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THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH

By

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Portrait of Mrs. Beaufoy.

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THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH

The materials for a history of Gainsborough's life and work are strangely and disconcertingly meagre. And this is the more disappointing when we remember how full a record exists of his great rival and contemporary. Literature has made the career of Reynolds no less familiar than those of his friends, Johnson, Burke, or Goldsmith. How is it, then, that a modern writer finds it so difficult to gather facts for a sufficient monograph of Gainsborough? The explanation certainly does not lie in any accepted inferiority, for Gainsborough at least divides the supremacy of our school with the older artist. Nor, though perhaps more emphatically a painter's painter than Sir Joshua, is his art of the kind which appeals only to the few. For while the full measure of his power is recognised chiefly by the initiated, he delights a multitude whose knowledge goes no deeper than the perception of his grace, his distinction, and his poetic charm. The anomaly is to be accounted for partly by the peculiar character of Gainsborough as a man, partly by the comparatively short duration of his activity in London, which covered only the last fourteen years of his life. It is a commonplace to say that the tone of cultivated society in England during the eighteenth century was pre-eminently literary; that never, perhaps, has it approximated more closely to the ideal fostered by the institution of the French *salon*. Conversation was a fine art, and an acquaintance with letters was deemed a necessary part of a gentleman's equipment. Statesmen and poets, wits and men of letters, flocked together to argue and discuss, sometimes, it is believed, to pose, and

occasionally to applaud. In such re-unions Sir Joshua was a prominent figure. Memoirs of the day abound in references to his art, to his friends, to his sterling character, and to his amiable manners. Such pages have nothing to say of Gainsborough. From a society where all more or less affected culture he held aloof. The least literary of painters, occupied with his own thoughts rather than with other men's conceptions, he disliked and avoided everything in the nature of speculative discussion. He had little love for books, and declared in one of his letters that his reading had been in the volume of nature, and that he coveted no other learning. The society which refreshed and delighted Reynolds would have wearied him and left him depressed. He had acquaintances among men of letters but scarcely a friend, except Sheridan. He loved the company of musicians, of actors, in fact, of all those among whom he might laugh and jest with more than a *soupçon* of licence. He is said to have had extraordinary powers of repartee; but his retorts were the fruit of mother-wit, and had no literary flavour. During his prosperous career he suffered few of those griefs and disappointments which turn the mind to deep thoughts or bitter musings. Curious as it may seem in the creator of so many marvels of elegance, refinement, and *spiritualité*, Gainsborough's personal tastes led him rather into the company of Tony Lumpkins than of young Marlows. It is natural, then, that the companion of Quin and Foote, of Abel and Fischer, should figure less prominently in the archives of his day than the friend of Burke and Johnson, of Goldsmith and Boswell.

No very complete biography of Gainsborough has yet been written. The most important is Mr. Fulcher's more than respectable essay, which has been the chief authority for the following sketch. A certain weight must be given to the short memoir by Philip Thicknesse, of whom we shall hear a good deal as we go along. Its value is discounted no doubt by the character of its writer, a man notoriously incapable of either calm judgment or impartial narrative; his *brochure* seems to have been over contemptuously dismissed by subsequent students of Gainsborough's career. Such as it is, it is the only contemporary record we possess, and Thicknesse, if dull-witted and wrongheaded, was at least conscientious and sincere.

John Thomas Smith, once Keeper of the Prints in the British Museum, and author of the vivacious life of Nollekens, was at one time anxious to write a biography of Gainsborough. He commissioned Constable, himself a native of Gainsborough's country, to collect material; with what poor success is shown in the following letter :

"East Bergholt, *7th May*, 1797.

"Dear Friend Smith,—If you remember, in my last I promised to write again soon and tell what I could about Gainsborough. I hope you will not think me negligent when I inform you that I have not been able to learn anything of consequence respecting him : I can assure you it is not for the want of asking that I have not been successful, for indeed I have talked with those who knew him. I believe in Ipswich they did not know his value till they lost him. He belonged to something of a musical club in that town, and painted some of their portraits in a picture of a choir. I heard it was in Colchester ; I shall endeavour to see it before I come to town, which will be soon. He was generally the butt of the company, and his wig was to them a fund of amusement, as it was often snatched from his head and thrown about the room, &c."

The rest of the letter throws no further light on the subject, though it continues in the same strain.

So far as it is known, the story of Gainsborough's life is a simple and happy one. It may be broadly divided into three sections, their divisions being marked by the two great events of the painter's career—his migrations to Bath and London.

GAINSBOROUGH IN SUFFOLK.

Thomas Gainsborough was born early in May, 1727 (the exact date is not known), in the country town of Sudbury, in Suffolk. He was the youngest of a family of nine children, all brought up reputably and well by his father, a thrifty tradesman variously described as a milliner, a clothier, a crape manufacturer, and a shroudmaker, who no doubt, combined all these avocations and, said scandal, occasionally helped them out with a little quiet smuggling. The elder Gainsborough was a dissenter, of the sect of Independents, and Thomas was baptized on the 14th of May at the meeting-house of that denomination. His mother, however, was a member of the Church of England. The picturesque old house in which he saw the light was originally an inn, with the sign of the Black Horse. An engraving by Finden has preserved its quaint gables and projecting upper stories, although the building itself can no longer be identified.

Sudbury was one of those eastern burghs in which Edward III. had planted the Flemish weavers, whom he brought over to teach their craft to his subjects, and the ancient industry still flourished in the eighteenth century. The income of Gainsborough, senior, was derived chiefly from the manufacture of fine woollen goods (technically called "crapes") and from the lugubrious *métier* of shroudmaking. The latter industry, of which he long enjoyed a monopoly in the district, he had introduced into Suffolk from Coventry. He is described as of fine presence and manners, extremely neat and punctilious in his dress, a good citizen, an upright tradesman, and a kind and conscientious master. Of his wife, whose maiden name was Burroughs, we are told little, save that she was

a notable housewife, and had a "genteel talent" for flower-painting. In what we know of this worthy couple we find little indeed to account for the brilliant artistic gifts of their youngest son. But some strain of originality must have lain dormant in the blood, for two of Thomas's elder brothers seem to have shown remarkable powers of invention in other fields. John, an eccentric person, whose freaks were often the nine days' wonder of his native town, had undoubtedly mechanical genius, though of an unpractical kind. His talent seems, indeed, to have had a touch of madness about it. He was known in the neighbourhood as "Scheming Jack." One of his exploits was the invention of a flying apparatus, with which he made a public experiment from the roof of a house. The unhappy Icarus promptly fell into a neighbouring ditch amidst the laughter of the assembled crowd. Among his most successful and most useless inventions were a cradle that rocked itself, a cuckoo that would sing all the year round, and a wheel that turned in a still bucket of water. He was engrossed in later life by an invention for the discovery of the longitude, and, as his poor wife complained, laid out every five guineas sent him by his more prosperous brother on brass-work for his apparatus. When at last this machine was completed he determined to go to the East Indies to try it. He got no further than London, where he fell ill and died.

Humphrey, the second brother, had the inventive faculty too, but within saner limits. He became a dissenting minister and settled at Henley-on-Thames. Between him and Thomas a warm affection always existed, and nothing pleased the painter more during his career in London than to take a day's holiday by the river-side with his brother. A fine portrait by Gainsborough of this favourite companion was at the Gainsborough Exhibition in 1885. In treatment it is somewhat akin to that of the *Parish Clerk* in the National Gallery—the face turned upwards, the light falling upon it, the expression thoughtful and melancholy. Humphrey Gainsborough was an ardent worker in his profession, and his mechanical experiments were the amusements of his leisure. His friends asserted that Watt owed to him one of the most important improvements in his steam-engine, the condensation of the steam in a separate vessel. The appropriation of his idea by Watt is said to have preyed greatly upon his mind. A curious sundial of novel

construction executed by him is in the British Museum. He anticipated the invention of fire-proof boxes, and gained a premium of £50 from the Society of Arts for the model of a tide-mill. In the summer of 1776, when on his way to dine with some friends, he fell dead on the road.

Of the painter's two remaining brothers, one, Mathias, died in boyhood from the effects of an accident. Of the other, Robert, little is known beyond the fact that he settled in Lancashire. His four sisters, all married: Mary, a dissenting minister named Gibbon, and Susanna, a Mr. Gardiner, both of Bath; Sarah, Mr. Dupont, and Elizabeth, Mr. Bird, both of Sudbury. The marriage of Sarah is of most interest to us. Her son, Gainsborough Dupont, became his uncle's pupil and assistant. He died in 1797 at the early age of thirty, but not before having given evidence of great talent, both as painter and engraver. Many of his mezzotints after his uncle's works are excellent. His chief original picture is a portrait group of the Elder Brethren of the Trinity House, which hangs in the Council Hall of that corporation. On the death of his uncle he is said to have completed several of his unfinished pictures, and a good many portraits which now bear the name of the older man, are, probably at least, the work of his nephew.

As a child, Gainsborough was duly sent to get learning at the grammar school of his native town, the head-master of which was his mother's brother, the Reverend Humphrey Burroughs. His progress in the humanities was, however, slight, for every unobserved moment was given, not to mastering the contents of his books, but to the ornamentation of their fly-leaves and covers with sketches of flowers, trees, and animals. "At ten he is said to have spent all his leisure pencil in hand, and to have already gained some facility in sketching. At twelve he had resolved to be a painter, and was busy with colours and brushes. At fourteen his schooling ended." "And yet," says Allan Cunningham, "his letters, which I have seen, show no want in the art of expressing clear thoughts in clear words." He was "quick at the uptake," and gathered knowledge instinctively as he trod the path of life. His first drawing is said to have been a group of trees, which in later years he gave, together with many other sketches of trees, rocks, shepherds, ploughmen, and pastoral scenes on scraps of letter-paper, to his first

patron, Mr. Philip Thicknesse. "I considered it," writes Thicknesse, "a wonderful performance, not unworthy of a place in one of the painter's best landscapes." Be this as it may, the boy evidently gave precocious signs of talent. His greatest delight was sketching from nature. Holidays were often begged for this purpose, and not unfrequently granted, when the young artist would be off to the pleasant woods that skirted his native town, and spend long summer days in drawing. On one occasion the usual slip of paper from his father to his uncle, authorising the treat, was refused. The signed formula, "Give Tom a holiday," was nevertheless forged by the audacious truant with such exactness, that it readily deceived Mr. Burroughs. The trick was discovered by some untoward accident, and Tom's father paid a horrified tribute to the excellence of the fraud by exclaiming, "Tom will be hanged!" When, however, the sketches made by the boy were submitted to him, he changed his mind, and decided that "Tom would be a genius!" Another anecdote of the painter's childhood deals with a sketch known as *Tom Peartree*, which anticipated the pretensions of the detective camera! On several occasions the paternal orchard had been robbed, the thief always getting off scot-free. But one day Tom happened to be drawing among some bushes in the garden, when, looking up, he saw a peasant of the neighbourhood leaning over the wall and gazing up wistfully at the laden pear-trees. The boy sketched him, and showed his *pièce de conviction* in the family circle, to the delight of his father, who afterwards produced it to the confusion of the culprit.

Such unequivocal signs of a vocation Gainsborough's parents wisely determined not to disregard. At fourteen he was sent to London to study art. On the authority, apparently, of Grignon the engraver, he is said to have boarded with a silversmith whose name is not recorded, but who at least introduced him to Gravelot. Gravelot not only taught him the elements of his own art, but recognizing his true bent, procured him admission to the Saint Martin's Lane Academy. Shortly afterwards the boy entered the studio of Hayman, a mediocre and now almost forgotten painter, whose historical pictures were in high repute at the time, but whose fame as a *viveur* was far better deserved. A youth like Gainsborough, who even in childhood had learnt the secret of a constant communion with Nature, had little indeed to gain from the teaching of

Hayman, or the example of his contemporaries. Art in this country was at its lowest ebb. The long succession of illustrious foreigners who had given a vicarious glory to painting in England for more than two hundred years, had come to an end, and our native school was just beginning to struggle to its feet, with the help of several mediocrities, such as Hayman, Richardson, Heighway, and two men of genius,

Portrait of a Man in pencil.

Hogarth and Wilson. Hogarth, however, was ostracised by his brethren. Wilson was unappreciated, as, by the way, he still remains. The art that Gainsborough saw applauded and imitated must have seemed contemptible enough to his frank eyes, even in his novitiate. From his apprenticeship he can have gleaned little but some knowledge of the mechanics of his art, and plentiful indications of what to avoid. His

instincts preserved him from the assimilation of a vulgar and feeble ideal, but certain early portraits are said to have been absolutely without distinction. In the National Gallery of Ireland, however, there are two portraits in pencil, dated 1743-4, which prove that at the age of sixteen Gainsborough had already gained the delicacy of hand and the power to see which are conspicuous in the more careful works of his later years,

Portrait of a Woman in pencil.

such, for instance, as the *Parish Clerk*. Hayman's social example was unfortunate for the country-bred lad, and the weaknesses of his after life are referred by his biographers to this early influence. Not that his lapses were of a very serious nature. It is certain, however, that he sowed a fair crop of wild oats, and acquired a taste for conviviality of a rather Dutch description. A letter written in his maturity to John

Henderson, the actor, seems to point to the usual youthful follies: "Don't run about London streets fancying you are catching strokes of nature, at the hazard of your constitution. It was my first school, and deeply read in petticoats I am, therefore you may allow me to caution you."

After three years of apprenticeship to such art and morality as Hayman had to teach, Gainsborough resolved to set up for himself. He took a lodging in Hatton Garden, and began work for dealers, painting landscapes and laborious portraits at prices varying from three to five guineas. He also worked at modelling, and acquired great facility in the rendering of animal forms and movements. But his efforts met with little encouragement, and at the end of a year's probation, he made up his mind to leave London, and seek his fortune in the kindlier atmosphere of his native Suffolk.

It may be, as Cunningham tells us, that he was moved to this step by a mistrust of his own powers, which made him look upon himself as at best a possibly successful provincial portrait-painter. He saw, no doubt, that he was not likely to excel by the methods in vogue at the moment. It may be too, that like Constable after him, he felt that there was "room for a natural painter," and that for such a one, his own woods and fields would be his best teachers. But probably the decisive consideration was one of immediate £ s. d. He followed the line of least resistance, moving from London to his native district because the latter held out hopes of a sufficient income for his wants, and left future developments to take care of themselves.

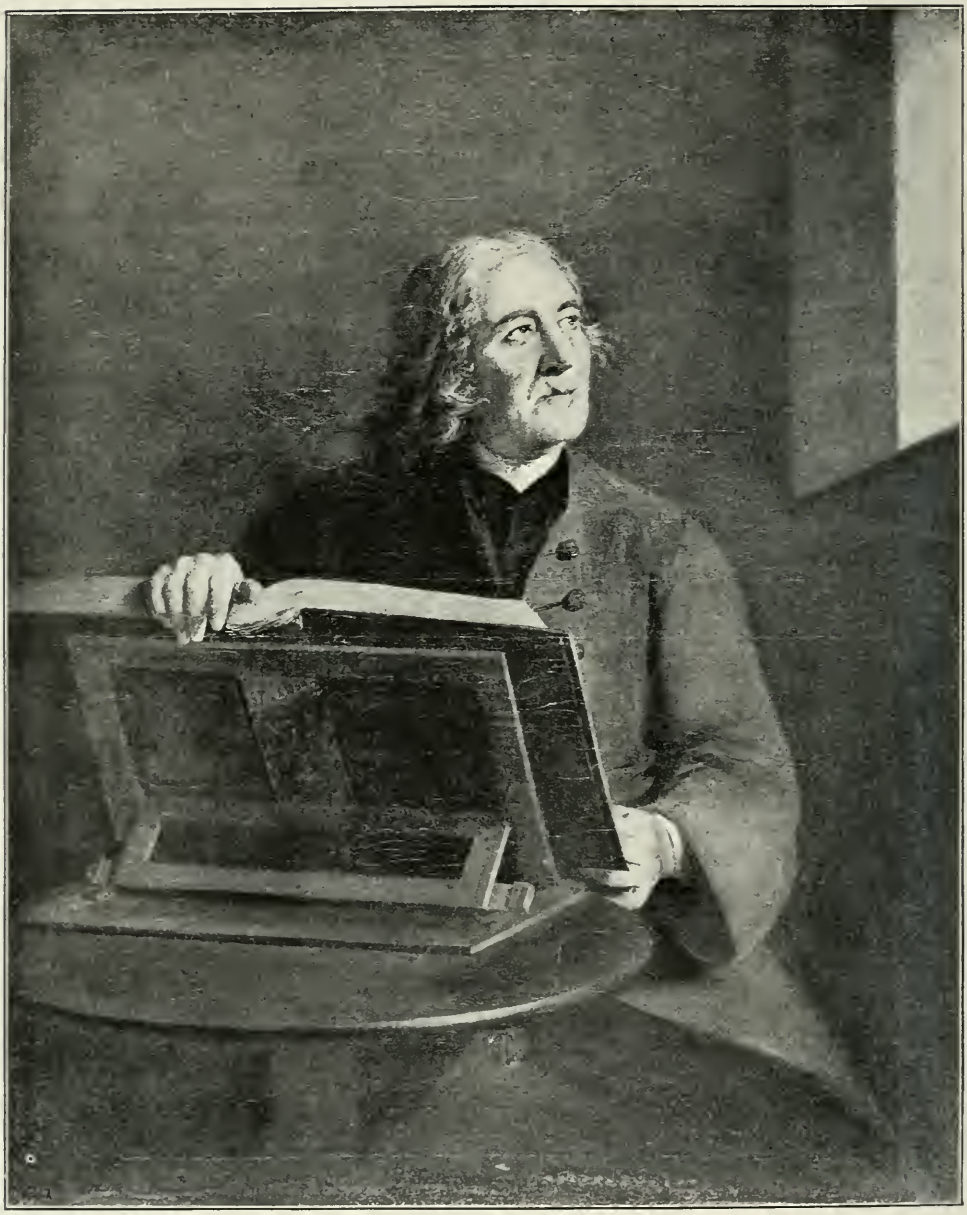
At eighteen he accordingly returned to Sudbury, where he was most cordially received. Good looks, a reputation for talent, a bright intelligence in conversation combined with perfect modesty of bearing, gave him a peculiar charm for those with whom he was brought into contact. He at once began the earnest study of landscape, rising at dawn to note effects of early morning light, and often working till sunset. The sylvan beauty of the Suffolk fields and lanes was to him, as to Constable, a never-failing source of inspiration. There was not, he used to declare, "a picturesque clump of trees, nor even a single tree of any beauty, no, nor hedgerow, stem, nor post," about his native place, that was not indelibly pictured in his memory.

T. Gainsborough, pinxit

Wood near Cornard, Suffolk.

At this distance of time it is impossible to trace the influences under which he laboured otherwise than by the intrinsic evidence in his work. Like every other painter reared in the eastern counties, he seems to have formed himself on Dutch models. Just as, a generation later, Old Crome and his disciples were to mould themselves on the examples of Hobbema and Ruysdael, so Gainsborough seems to have taken the mediocre Wynants for his master. The connection is unmistakable. In his early pictures the method is thoroughly Wynants-like. The conceptions throw back to the Dutchman's; the palette is like his; the bits of roadside scenery, even the placing of the figures, the oppositions of sky and earth, of cloud and tree, of sandy foreground and forest edge, of empty to crowded spaces, are so identical in both men that the difference could hardly be expressed in words. It is only in the delicacy of his colour and impasto that Gainsborough shows a distinct superiority at this time over his chosen guide. His work, indeed, from the very first, has a distinction of which no trace is to be found in Wynants. But that distinction springs entirely from the two points of superiority I have mentioned. Gainsborough never ventured upon the use of full tones until he had mastered the harmonies to be won from grays. In his *Great Cornard Wood*, the typical example of his first period, there is no positive colour. The chromatic scale is almost as quiet as Van Goyen's. The result is, that we have a picture as thoroughly at peace with itself, as completely singleminded in its aim, as free from accident and irrelevance as a Van Goyen, or a Ruysdael.

According to the earliest version of his history, it was on one of his sketching expeditions that Gainsborough fell in love with his future wife. The artist was at work upon "a group of fine trees, with sheep reposing below and wood-doves roosting above," when a beautiful girl appeared on the scene, and as Cunningham quaintly puts it, "was at once admitted into the landscape and the feelings of the artist." But in Fulcher's *Life* the pretty pastoral is demolished, and a less idyllic legend substituted. Miss Margaret Burr was, it seems, the sister of a traveller employed in the business of Gainsborough the elder. Her extraordinary beauty was long a tradition in Suffolk, and on the arrival of the young artist from London, the country belle was naturally eager to have her portrait painted. The sittings, which were protracted to the utmost, ended in the betrothal



Portrait of Orpin, Parish Clerk of Bradford-on-Avon.

of the young couple. They were married the following year; Gainsborough being then nineteen, and his wife twelve months younger. Unlike many such ventures, this early marriage was in all respects fortunate. Mrs. Gainsborough brought an income of £200 a year to her husband, who was thus enabled to start on his career without any harassing dependence on daily effort for existence. She was further a woman of sweet and equable temper, and proved the most tender and faithful of companions. Even Thicknesse, whose animosity she incurred by a desire with which he credited her to detach her husband from himself, could find no charge more damaging to bring against her than one of thriftiness verging on parsimony. He declares that the painter never dared to drive up to his own door in a hackney coach, fearing his wife's wrath at the extravagance of such a luxury, and that he was invariably set down some hundred yards or so short of his destination. It was well known, however, among Gainsborough's friends, that this proceeding was due to an absurd weakness of the painter himself, who could not bear to be seen driving in a hired carriage. Another unlikely story relates how Mrs. Gainsborough hoarded up a quantity of drawings, many of them the work of her daughter, Mrs. Fischer, with a view to one day selling them as her husband's. "After Tom's death they will fetch a good deal of money," is the prudent reflection ascribed to her, and "Much good may they do her!" the biographer's vicious comment. Some colour was given to these calumnies by the frugal disposition Mrs. Gainsborough is said to have inherited from her Scotch ancestry—a disposition which no doubt had its value in the wife of one so impulsively generous as the painter himself.

A certain mystery surrounds the parentage of Margaret Burr. It was whispered that she was an illegitimate daughter of one of the exiled Stuarts; other rumours pointed to the Duke of Bedford as her father. She herself seems to have inclined to the former belief. A story accepted by all who have written about her, tells how, on the occasion of some festivity, the magnificence of her dress attracted attention, and she justified her splendour to her niece, Mrs. Lane, with, "I have some right to this, for you know, my love, I am a prince's daughter." The income of £200 a year was, no doubt, derived from the mysterious parent, but so well was the secret kept, that her own daughters never

knew by whom the allowance was paid. The money, they told an inquirer, was regularly transmitted through a London bank and placed to Mrs. Gainsborough's account, but further than this they could tell nothing. Some little support is given to the other version of her pedigree by the remarkable likeness which certainly existed between her and the Duke of Bedford. Portraits of them both hung near each other at the Gainsborough Exhibition in 1885, and the likeness was undeniable.

The painter's home seems to have been peculiarly happy. In spite of his convivial turn upon occasions, he was never more contented, even when most in vogue, than by his own fireside. We are told that "he loved to sit by his wife in the evening, and make sketches of whatever occurred to his fancy, all of which he threw beneath the table, save such as were more than commonly happy, and those were preserved, and either finished as sketches or expanded into pictures." In connection with his domestic life, one of those little anecdotes, which by repetition assume an undeserved importance and occasionally give a false ring to character, has been handed down. On the rare occasions of little domestic squabbles (for Gainsborough, though easily appeased, was hot-tempered and hasty) the painter, if conscious of having spoken sharply to his wife, would write her a penitent note, signing it with the name of his favourite dog, "Fox," and addressing it to his wife's pet, "Tristram." The dog was taught to deliver these notes to his companion, and on its receipt, Margaret would reply in such fashion as this: "My own dear Fox,—You are always loving and good, and I am a naughty little female ever to worry you as I too often do; so we will kiss and say no more about it. Your own affectionate Tris." It is to be hoped that this little comedy had no run!

Upon their marriage in 1745, the young couple rented a small house in Sudbury for about six months, Gainsborough working at his sketches of cottagers and woodland scenery. They then removed to Ipswich, where the painter no doubt hoped to find patrons among the rich merchants of the city, or its neighbouring squires. But commissions were slow in coming. One provincial magnate proposed indeed to employ him, but an interview resulted in the discovery that the artist had been mistaken for a house-painter, and was expected to put in window panes, and touch up dilapidated doors and walls. During one

Landscape.

of his sketching expeditions on the banks of the Orwell, he made the acquaintance of a stranger, who showed much interest in his work. This was Mr. Joshua Kirby, a writer upon art, who became a valued friend and congenial companion. Kirby was a man of some reputation in his day. He is now remembered as the author of a *Treatise on Perspective*, as the first President of the Society of Arts, as the father of the exemplary Mrs. Trimmer, and as one of Gainsborough's sitters. He had a house at Ipswich, and the two men spent many a pleasant hour in each other's company, sketching, or theorising on the art they both loved. So high was Mr. Kirby's opinion of Gainsborough's talents, that he placed his young son with him as a pupil, no less to the advantage of the youth's manners than of his talents, if we accept the high authority of the future Mrs. Trimmer. "Having," she writes to her brother during his apprenticeship, "so good an example to copy after, I imagine you improve very much in politeness." It is possible, of course, that the painter had some of Hayman's polish still about him, and that Miss Kirby "wrote ironical," though irony was scarcely Mrs. Trimmer's forte. The friendships between the two families was interrupted by the removal of the Kirbies to London in 1753. Foremost among his other intimates at this period were Mr. Kilderbee, of Ipswich, for whom he painted many pictures. He was the original owner of the exquisite *View in the Mall, St. James's Park*. Mr. Hingeston of Southwold, of whom he painted two portraits, and Mr. Robert Edgar, a lawyer of Colchester, and one of his earliest patrons. The Edgar family afterwards removed to Ipswich, and were the fortunate possessors of many examples of the painter. A most interesting letter to Mr. Edgar, characteristic of Gainsborough alike as artist and man, is extant. It has been often quoted in part, but being in fact a sort of *Apologia* for the individuality of method for which the painter was sometimes taken to task, it demands reprinting here.

"Sir,—I am favor'd with your obliging letter, and return you many thanks for your kind intention; I thought I should have been at Colchester by this time, as I promis'd my sister I would the first opportunity, but business comes in, and being chiefly in the Face way, I'm afraid to put people off when they are in the mind to sit. You

A Dog.

please me much by saying that no other fault is found in your picture[1] than the roughness of the surface, for that part being of use in giving force to the effect at a proper distance, and what a judge of painting knows an original from a copy by; in short, being the touch of the pencil, which is harder to preserve than smoothness, I am much better pleas'd that they should spy out things of that kind, than to see an eye half an inch out of its place, or a nose out of drawing when viewed at a proper distance. I don't think it would be more ridiculous for a person to put his nose close to the canvas and say the colours smell offensive, than to say how rough the paint lies; for one is just as material as the other with regard to hurting the effect and drawing of a picture. Sir Godfrey Kneller used to tell them that pictures were not made to smell of; and what made his pictures more valuable than others with the connoisseurs was his pencil or touch. I hope, Sir, you'll pardon this dissertation upon pencil and touch, for if I gain no better point than to make you and Mr. Clubb laugh when you next meet at the sign of the 'Tankard,' I shall be very well contented. I'm sure I could not paint his pictures for laughing, he gave such a description of eating and drinking at that place. I little thought you were a lawyer when I said not one in ten was worth hanging. I told Clubb of that, and he seemed to think I was lucky that I did not say one in a hundred. It's too late to ask your pardon now, but really, Sir, I never saw one of your profession look so honest in my life, and that's the reason I concluded you were in the wool-trade. Sir Jasper Wood was so kind as to set me right, otherwise perhaps I should have made more blunders.

"I am, Sir,

"Your most obedient and obliged humble servant,

"THO. GAINSBOROUGH.

"IPSWICH, *March* 13, 1758."

Of all the friendships formed at this period, however, that which was of most significance in the painter's career was undoubtedly the intimacy with that Philip Thicknesse to whom we have already had occasion to allude more than once. To judge fairly of the complications

[1] The picture, judging from a letter of an earlier date, was a portrait of his correspondent.

that arose from this friendship, it is necessary to know something of the governor's character. No doubt Thicknesse had redeeming qualities,

Portrait of Lady Ray.

otherwise he could scarcely have enjoyed a long intimacy with one so essentially intelligent and lovable as Gainsborough. But these were

obscured by absurdities, and lost sight of in the general irritation excited by his querulous foolishness. All contemporary evidence paints Thicknesse as a quarrelsome, self-sufficient busybody, whose vagaries were not even tempered by the good-nature which is supposed to go with folly. "He had in a remarkable degree," says Fulcher, "the faculty of lessening the number of his friends, and increasing the number of his enemies. He was perpetually imagining insult, and would sniff an injury from afar. . . . Contention was necessary to his existence." It seems undeniable, however, that he appreciated the genius of Gainsborough, and had a real affection for him, so far as his own splenetic temper allowed. He was by profession a soldier, and had gained some notoriety by a duel fought just after obtaining his commission. Later in life he thrust himself prominently before the world by a libel on his superior officer, for which he was imprisoned, by the publication of a series of *procès-verbaux*, setting forth his quarrels with various acquaintances and relatives, among others his own son and daughter-in-law, Lord and Lady Audley, and by a vindicatory autobiography. The chance that brought him and Gainsborough together was his appointment, shortly after the painter's establishment at Ipswich, to the governorship of Landguard Fort, a military station opposite to Harwich, and close to the modern watering-place of Felixstowe. He himself gives the following account of this first meeting. Walking one day in the garden of a friend at Ipswich, he noticed a melancholy-looking countryman leaning with folded arms over the wall. The figure remained so long motionless that Thicknesse drew his friend's attention to it, who gravely replied that the man had been there all day, and he thought he must be a madman. On stepping nearer to accost the supposed lunatic, Thicknesse perceived him to be the simulacrum of a man, painted on a shaped wooden board. It was, in fact, an enlarged replica of that portrait of Tom Peartree, the story of which has been already told.[1]

Struck by the truth and vigour of this painted hoax, Thicknesse at once obtained the artist's address and paid him a visit. "Mr. Gains-

[1] This curious relic is still in existence. It was unearthed in an old summer-house in Gainsborough's garden at Ipswich long after his death, and was included in the exhibition of the artist's works at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1885. See the excellent annotated Catalogue of that exhibition, by Mr. F. G. Stephens.

borough," he says, "received me in his painting-room, in which stood several portraits, truly drawn, perfectly like, but stiffly painted and worse coloured. Among them was the late Admiral Vernon's, for it was not many years after he had taken Portobello, with six ships only; but when I turned my eyes to his little landscapes and drawings I

Landscape.

was charmed; these were his works of fancy, and gave him infinite delight."

Thicknesse now poured out upon the painter the doubtful treasure of his despotic affection. He began by commissioning a view of Landguard Fort, with Harwich in the distance. With this, for which he paid fifteen guineas, he was so delighted that he had it engraved by Major. The print is still in existence, but the picture, having

been hung upon a wall built with salt-water mortar, was injured out of existence. Thicknesse, of course, mixed by right with all the neighbouring gentry, and it seems probable that he really exerted himself to get commissions for his friend. The arrogance of his claim to be Gainsborough's only discriminating patron has led perhaps to his over-contemptuous treatment by the painter's biographers. However this may be, commissions for sketches of country-houses and portraits of their owners began to flow in freely at about this date. The artist, too, became a most welcome guest in the homes of his patrons. "His affable manners," says a contemporary, "endeared him to all with whom his profession brought him into contact, either at the cottage or the castle. There was that peculiar bearing which could not fail to leave a pleasing impression. Many houses in Suffolk, as well as in the neighbouring county, were always open to him, and their owners thought it an honour to entertain him. I have seen the aged features of the peasantry lit up with a grateful recollection of his many acts of kindness and benevolence." The love of music and whimsical passion for all kinds of musical instruments, so marked in later years, were already beginning to declare themselves at this date. A fiddle lent by Thicknesse was practised upon with such ardour "that although," says the governor, "he had then never touched a musical instrument, before I got my fiddle home again he had made such proficiency in music that I would as soon have painted against him as have attempted to fiddle against him." This is the more remarkable if, as William Jackson the musician asserted in later years, "though possessed of ear, taste, and genius, he never had application enough to learn his notes." For a musical club to which he belonged at Ipswich, he painted a portrait group of the members. Mr. Strutt, its owner in the time of Fulcher, thus describes it: "Though very slight and unfinished, it is exceedingly spirited, and is the more interesting as it was composed from memory. Immediately in front of the spectator are the portraits of Gainsborough himself, and his friend Captain Clarke, who is leaning familiarly on the painter's shoulder. The heads of both are turned towards Wood, a dancing master, who is playing on the violin, accompanied on the violoncello by one Mills. The latter figure is merely outlined,

Gainsborough declaring that he 'could not recollect the expression of his phiz.' Gibbs, on the opposite side of the table, which is standing in the centre, is sound asleep. There is a sly piece of satire in this, he being the only real musician in the party, and his sleeping would seem to indicate that the performance is not of first-rate quality. It is a candlelight scene, and, by the condition of the table, some degree of conviviality appears to have prevailed. Gainsborough has his glass in his hand, that of Gibbs stands before him, as also Clarke's, and one is overturned. A couple of lights are placed on each side of the music-stand, before which are two performers. The portrait of Gainsborough possesses much grace, and is very like that exhibited at the British Institution many years ago. He is dressed in a dark claret-coloured coat. . . . When Gainsborough was leaving Ipswich his . . . . friends expressed a wish to have some memorial of his pencil . . . . that I have been describing came to my father's hands." All through life Gainsborough was a lavish distributor of his work among his friends, which makes it all the more remarkable that his worst quarrel with Thicknesse arose through failure to present the latter with his portrait.

GAINSBOROUGH AT BATH.

It was in 1760 that Gainsborough took his first decisive step towards fame and fortune. His growing facility and the popularity he had won so easily in Suffolk, had given him confidence, and he felt that his powers demanded a wider field. The fame of Reynolds (who in this same year "raised his prices to twenty-five guineas (for a head), and began to lay the foundations of a fortune") may have roused his emulation. He determined to migrate to Bath, then in the heyday of fashion. Thicknesse does not forget to proclaim himself once more the *deus ex machinâ*. "It was I who dragged him from the obscurity of a country town, at a time when all his neighbours were as ignorant of his great talents as he was himself!" Thicknesse, in fact, owned a house in Bath, to which he paid annual visits. Among the beaux and belles of the gay watering-place he foresaw sitters galore for his friend. So sanguine was the painter himself, that anxious to make his *début* in style, he took a lodging in the then new and fashionable Circus, at a rental of £50 a year; greatly to the alarm of his prudent wife, who may be pardoned for thinking it a rather sudden leap from the modest six pounds per annum they had paid for their house at Ipswich. Eager to retain his hold upon the artist, Thicknesse proposed that the Bath campaign should be inaugurated by a portrait of himself, to serve as a decoy duck for other customers. Only one sitting, however, was given, for somewhat to the patron's chagrin, the painter found he had no need of such manœuvres to secure a *clientèle*. Rumours of his talent spread rapidly. His studio was soon besieged with fashionable sitters, and beginning with the modest charge of five guineas a head, he

was before long enabled, or rather compelled, to raise his prices to forty for a half, and a hundred guineas for a whole length. The adumbration

The Duchess of Grafton.

of Thicknesse was turned to the wall, and Gainsborough began to show symptoms of recalcitrance under the dictatorial benevolence of his

Mæcenas. All such signs of revolt Thicknesse attributed, rightly enough most likely, to his bugbear, Mrs. Gainsborough.

Gainsborough's almost invariable neglect to sign and date his works makes it difficult to trace the precise course of his development. It would be easy to fix the sequence of his pictures if we had them all before us, but for actual dates we have to rely upon the scanty evidence left by his contemporaries. Exhibition catalogues give little help, for, after the fashion of the day, his sitters figure not by name, but under such headings as "Portrait of a Lady," "Portrait of a Gentleman," "A Lady of Quality." And it is not until the year 1761, when Gainsborough sent a picture to the second public exhibition of works of art held in this country, that even these slender scraps of information are available. Between 1743, the earliest date which occurs on work of his, and 1761, we have to depend entirely upon a few passages in the letters of his friends and of Horace Walpole. Fortunately the development of his style was so logical, continuous, and clear, that no difficulty can be felt in fitting those pictures, whether portraits or landscapes, which come under our notice, into their true chronological order.

In 1760 the leading artists of the capital formed themselves into a society, and established an annual exhibition, in imitation of continental academies. "They please themselves much," writes Dr. Johnson in an often quoted letter to Baretti, "with the multitude of spectators, and imagine that the English school will rise much in reputation."

Gainsborough's name is not among the contributors to the exhibition in its first year, and this taken in conjunction with an extant letter of Mr. Kirby's, dated 1759, and addressed to his son, shortly after placing the youth with Gainsborough at Ipswich, strengthens the contention that the move to Bath took place, not in 1758, as asserted by Cunningham, but in 1760. Gainsborough, the fashionable portrait-painter of Bath, is hardly likely to have been an absentee from the first representative gathering of English art, though this may well have been the case with the obscure genius of Ipswich. In 1761 he was represented by a full-length of Mr. Nugent, afterwards Lord Clare, and the following year by a portrait of Mr. Poyntz of Bath. To the fourth year's show he sent a large landscape, and two male portraits, one being that of Quin the actor, who is said to have been not very willing to

T. Gainsborough R.A. Pinx.

Walter L. Colls Ph. Sc.

Portrait of a Lady.

sit, until the painter worked upon his vanity by the laughing assertion: "If you let me paint you, I shall live for ever!" Among the more

Portrait of David Garrick.

memorable portraits of his sojourn in Bath were those of David Garrick (whom he painted altogether five times), General Honywood, an equestrian portrait in a scarlet uniform, with a fine landscape background

(exhibited in 1765), Lady Grosvenor, and John, Duke of Argyle (exhibited 1767), Lady Sussex, Lord and Lady Ligonier (exhibited 1771), Lord Camden, Cramer the metallurgist, Laurence Sterne, and Samuel Richardson, besides a crowd of lesser celebrities. Concerning the first Garrick portrait, a story is current, versions of which have been told of other actors and their limners. Gainsborough is said to have had great difficulty in catching the likeness, being perplexed by the actor's extraordinary mobility of feature. In the space of a few minutes his face took on the likeness of half a dozen notabilities of the day. "Rot them for a couple of rogues," exclaimed the painter, referring to this and to a kindred display by Foote, "they have everyone's faces but their own!" The portrait of Garrick was nevertheless successfully accomplished, and Mrs. Garrick pronounced it "the best portrait ever painted of her Davy." It is now in the town-hall of Stratford-on-Avon, presented, according to the popular account, by Garrick himself, although on this point there is a conflict of evidence, an item in the municipal accounts for 1769 being: "£63 paid to Mr. Gainsborough for Mr. Garrick's picture."

While thus busy with his brush, Gainsborough had frequent need of the services of the public carrier between Bath and London, one Wiltshire, to transport a portrait to its owner, or a case of pictures to the exhibition. So great was Wiltshire's admiration for the artist, that he could never be induced to accept payment. "No, no," he protested, "I love painting too much." Finding at last that Gainsborough's pride was uneasy under the obligation, he proposed a compromise. "When you think," said the carrier, "that I have carried to the value of a little painting, I beg you will let me have one, Sir, and I shall be more than paid." Several of such acknowledgments were made, and descended as heirlooms to Wiltshire's son. They show Gainsborough to have been not behind his friend in generosity. Among them was the beautiful landscape, *The Return from Harvest*, in which Wiltshire's own waggon, a favourite horse he had proposed to Gainsborough as a model, and the artist's two daughters, as peasant girls, are introduced. The portrait of Orpin, parish clerk of Bradford-on-Avon, now in the National Gallery, was another of these payments.

Gainsborough, unlike the great rival of his later years, made no

incursions into the ideal. The poetry that informs his work was intimate and personal ; he had no yearnings after "the great manner."

Lord North.

"It is to the credit of his good sense and judgment," said Sir Joshua Reynolds, in his famous eulogium of his dead *confrère*, "that he never

did attempt that style of historical painting, for which his previous studies had made no preparation. Neither did he destroy the character and uniformity of his own style by the idle affectation of introducing mythological learning into any of his pictures." The nearest approach to such an attempt was a projected allegorical portrait of Shakespeare for the 1769 Jubilee at Stratford-on-Avon. A letter to Garrick, dated 1768, shows how uncongenial was the essay. It is also a good specimen of Gainsborough's lively and trenchant style in correspondence.

"Bath, 22 *August*, 1768.

"Dear Sir,—I doubt I stand accused (if not accursed) all this time for my neglect in not going to Stratford, and giving you a line from thence as I promised; but what can one do such weather as this—continual raining? My genius is so damped by it, that I can do nothing to please me. I have been several days rubbing in and rubbing out my design of Shakespeare, and hang me if I think I shall let it go, or let you see it at least. I was willing, like an ass as I am, to expose myself a little out of the simple portrait way, and had a notion of showing where that inimitable poet had his ideas from, by an immediate ray darting down upon his eye turned up for the purpose; but confound it, I can make nothing of my ideas, there has been such a fall of rain from the same quarter. You shall not see it, for I will cut it before you can come.

"Tell me, dear Sir, when you purpose coming to Bath, that I may be quick enough in my motions. Shakespeare's bust is a silly smiling thing, and I have not sense enough to make him more sensible in the picture, and so I tell ye, you shall not see it. I must make a plain picture of him, standing erect, and give it an old look, as if it had been painted at the time he lived; and there we shall fling 'em.

"I am, dear Sir,

"Your most obedient humble servant,

"Thomas Gainsborough."

By the time that the experiment of 1760 had led, after many strange proceedings, to the foundation of a "Royal Academy of Arts," the fame of Gainsborough had become so thoroughly established that he was found to be included in the thirty-six on whom the honour of membership was

bestowed. He had made many friends in all ranks, but his chief delight was in the society of the musicians and actors, who came to reap their periodical harvest at the gay watering-place. The proprietor of the Bath theatre, General Palmer, was among his intimates, and continually put a box at his disposal, in return for which civility Gainsborough, always lavish with his own productions, gave him several pictures. Many

Landscape.

virtuosi of his acquaintance were immortalized by portraits—Abel, the *viol-di-gamba* player; Giardini, the violinist; Fischer, the hautboy player, who afterwards became his son-in-law; Samuel Foote, and Edwin and John Henderson. Of Abel he painted a series of portraits. "Doubtless," says a contemporary *chroniqueur*, "it was in exchange for the notes of his *viol-di-gamba* that he obtained so many drafts upon the

genius of the painter." For it was the painter's impulsive habit to reward his Orpheus of the moment with any picture he might happen to covet. Thus, he gave to Colonel Hamilton, a first-rate amateur who delighted him by a solo on the violin, his picture of a *Boy at a Stile*, which the Colonel had often tried in vain to buy. To William Jackson, the composer, we owe a whimsical account of the ardour with which Gainsborough, like a child discarding old toys for new ones, attacked one instrument after another, as he became successively acquainted with their professors. In one respect Jackson's statement is rather surprising. He says the painter never even learnt his notes!

"Happening at one time to see a theorbo in a picture of Vandyke's, Gainsborough concluded, because, perhaps, it was finely painted, that the theorbo must be a fine instrument. He recollected to have heard of a German professor, and, ascending to his garret, found him dining on roasted apples and smoking his pipe, with his theorbo beside him.

"'I am come to buy your lute—name your price, and here's the money.'

"'I cannot sell my lute——'

"'No; not for a guinea or two? But you must sell it, I tell you.'

"'My lute is worth much money; it is worth ten guineas.'

"'Ay! that it is. See, here's the money.'

"So saying, he took up the instrument, laid down the price, went halfway down the stair, and returned.

"'I have done but half my errand; what is your lute worth if I have not your book?'

"'What book, Master Gainsborough?'

"'Why, the book of airs you have composed for the lute.'

"'Ah, sir, I can never part with my book!'

"'Pooh! you can make another at any time. This is the book I mean. There's ten guineas for it; so, once more, good day!'

"He went down a few steps, and returned again.

"'What use is your book to me if I don't understand it? And your lute, you may take it again if you won't teach me to play on it. Come home with me, and give me the first lesson.'

"'I will come to-morrow.'

"'You must come now.'

"'I must dress myself.'

"'For what? You are the best figure I have seen to-day.'

"'I must shave, sir.'

"'I honour your beard!'

"'I must, however, put on my wig.'

"'Damn your wig! Your cap and beard become you. Do you think if Vandyke was to paint you, he'd let you be shaved?'

"In this manner he frittered away his musical talents, and though possessed of ear, taste, and genius, he never had application enough to learn his notes. He scorned to take the first step; the second was of course out of his reach, and the summit became unattainable."

Prosperous in his career, and happy in his home and friends, Gainsborough seems to have spent nearly fourteen years at Bath before the thought of a yet wider field for his powers took any great hold on his mind. And yet he must long have felt himself fit to try conclusions with the foremost painters of his day, even with the redoubtable Sir Joshua himself. The explanation of his long quiescence seems to be merely want of ambition. His art gave him all he wanted; it filled his pockets and left him free, when painting hours were over, to indulge his taste for music and for the harmless forms of riotous living in which his evenings were passed. Thicknesse, according to his own account, spurred him out of Ipswich, and now again it is through the same irrepressible patron that we find him preparing for a second move. This time, however, the governor is not a voluntary agent. It is by fastening a quarrel upon his friend—if we take the less favourable view of his conduct—that he drives him to strike his tents and be off. The reader may remember that a certain portrait of Thicknesse had been set aside at the beginning of Gainsborough's practice in Bath. Of Mrs. Thicknesse he had painted a successful picture, which he gave to her husband, saying, "It has done me service, and I know it will give you pleasure." The lady cherished a desire for her husband's likeness as a pendant to her own, but Gainsborough, capricious as he was generous, for some reason always evaded the commission. It happened, however, that Mrs. Thicknesse, who had some skill in music, owned a *viol-di-gamba* of exquisite quality with the date of 1612 upon it. Gainsborough was just then at the height of his passion for the instrument, and this viol kept

him awake o' nights. Finally he went so far as to offer a hundred guineas for it. Thicknesse, according to his own account, thereupon privily

The Baillie Family.

desired his wife to present it to the painter. The Gainsboroughs were invited to sup, and after the meal, the artist was begged to play one of his friend Abel's lessons to the company. At the end of his performance,

Mrs. Thicknesse told him he had played so charmingly as to deserve the instrument for his own, and duly asked his acceptance of it, adding, however, "At your leisure give me in exchange my husband's picture to hang beside my own." The next morning—according to one account, he took it away in his coach—the *viol-di-gamba* was sent to its new owner, and Gainsborough sketched in the outline of a fresh portrait of his friend.

So far the version of Thicknesse and of the Gainsborough family tally, but they differ in the sequel. Thicknesse declares that Gainsborough became embittered against him by a malicious piece of tale-bearing, in which he was falsely accused of having said that the Gainsboroughs' two children ran about the streets of Ipswich without shoes and stockings, when he first knew them. The painter, he declares, thereupon turned the portrait to the wall, and even outraged Mrs. Thicknesse's feelings by ostentatiously displaying a full length of Fischer, gorgeous in scarlet and gold, which he had begun and finished after putting aside her husband, on one of her visits to the studio. Much incensed, the lady urged her lord to remonstrate. He did so with some bitterness, claiming the fulfilment of the bargain, or, as an alternative, the delivery of the portrait as it was. Gainsborough at once packed up both viol and picture and sent them home.

So says Thicknesse. From the Gainsborough side we get a detail which puts a different complexion on the whole business. It appears that the *viol-di-gamba* was not a gift at all, but that the painter put a hundred guineas into Mrs. Thicknesse's hand, privately, as payment for it. This piece of information is not based, however, on thoroughly satisfactory evidence. Allan Cunningham had it from a member of Gainsborough's family. The whole story is one of which it is impossible to know exactly the rights at this distance of time. The sort of careless generosity, which was such a marked characteristic of the painter, is by no means inconsistent with the conduct of which Thicknesse accuses him, and it is quite possible that distaste for the governor as a sitter and a growing sense of his endowments as a well-meaning incubus, blinded Gainsborough to the obligations he had taken upon himself.

Reasonably or not, the Thicknesses conceived themselves deeply aggrieved. The offending sketch was returned to its author, with a note requesting him to "take his brush, and first rub out the countenance of

the truest and warmest friend he ever had, and so done, then blot him for ever from his memory." Gainsborough no doubt hailed the final rupture with relief. He resolved to remove himself from the possibility of further discomfort, and suddenly made up his mind to quit Bath for London. His faithful ally, Wiltshire, undertook the transport of his household goods, and in the summer of 1774 he settled in the capital.

GAINSBOROUGH IN LONDON

In London, as at Bath, Gainsborough thought a good appearance half the battle. Echoes may have reached him of how Reynolds, when he migrated to the fashionable quarter of Leicester Fields, set up a gilded coach and servants with liveries laced with silver. At any rate he determined to make such proclamation of his own importance as was implied in a large house in the best part of the town. He took the western wing of Schomberg House, in Pall Mall, at the considerable rent of £300 per annum. The other wing was tenanted by John Astley, an obscure portrait painter, who had mended his fortunes by marriage with a rich widow. In his pre-nuptial days Astley had been a fellow-pupil with Reynolds under Hudson, and had also been one of his intimate friends in Rome. He is perhaps best remembered by a comical anecdote belonging to that period of his life. An expedition into the country had been made by the band of students, and the day being hot, first one, and then another, took off his coat. Astley alone clung to his upper garment. The banter of his companions forced him at last to discard it, when the cause of his reluctance stood revealed. The poor wretch had been reduced to lining his waistcoat with an unsuccessful canvas, and a landscape with a foaming waterfall gave piquancy to his back!

In Gainsborough's portion of Schomberg House, such alterations and additions as would fit it for the reception of fashionable sitters were at once taken in hand. The painter had good grounds for reckoning on immediate success. Reynolds, with all his industry, could hardly keep pace with the demands on his brush. There was room, in fact,

Drawing of a Lady.

for any number of portrait painters. The richer men of the time had their features limned nearly as often as they would have had them photographed, had they come into the world a century later. Gainsborough had as little difficulty as Sir Joshua, Allan Ramsay, or Romney before him, in diverting a sufficient stream from the great river of patrons through his own front door. Thicknesse—whose name seems to have beeen curiously descriptive of his own skin !—was determined, in spite of the snubbings he had received, to retain his self-appointed *rôle* of guardian angel. He wrote to Lord Bateman, recommending the painter to his kind consideration ; and as the peer honoured the draught on his good nature, Thicknesse was enabled to add the triumphs of Gainsborough's last ten years to the list of his own good deeds !

The triumphs began at once. Not many months passed before the King summoned Gainsborough to Buckingham Palace. George III. had noticed and greatly admired the painter's work at the annual exhibitions. A family group of the King, Queen, and three Princesses, turned the current of fashion strongly towards Pall Mall. It was the first of a series of commissions from Buckingham Palace, where Gainsborough became a constant visitor, and as the Princess Augusta afterwards told a younger artist, " a great favourite with all the Royal family." He painted every member of the King's house (several many times over), with the one exception of the Duke of York, whose portrait was never executed, though often projected. His portraits of the Queen were among his greatest triumphs. " Gainsborough," it has been remarked, " made even our old Queen Charlotte look picturesque." As a Tory of the orthodox type, he was personally more acceptable to the King than Reynolds, who, Whig as he was, stood to a certain degree suspect in the Royal mind, and was naturally drawn to the Prince of Wales' faction, and the society of Carlton House.

The King's example was speedily followed by lesser magnates. Between 1773 and 1777 the painter refrained from exhibiting with the Royal Academy, though busily at work. The cause of his abstention is said to have been some trifling disagreement with the President, with whom his relations never became cordial. Among Sir Joshua's many good qualities, a generous acceptance of rival claims cannot be numbered. Never quarrelsome or undignified, he nevertheless seems to have found it

hard to show cordiality to any one who at all encroached on what he thought his own domain, and his frigid politeness or grudging approval were speedily resented. It is the fashion to talk of Reynolds as if his character were very open, transparent, and easily understood. To me, I confess, it has always seemed just the reverse. His contemporaries leave us in no doubt as to his kindliness, good temper, and general clubableness. On the other hand, the sidelights through which he passes show him as a man in whom the strong feelings of those built differently from himself caused a discomfort he was apt to resent on its authors. Gainsborough, who was impulse personified, must have *lui donné sur les nerfs* in an extreme degree. It appears certain that open discourtesies were entirely on Gainsborough's side. He neglected to attend the Academy meetings, never appeared at the periodical dinners, and, as we have seen, withheld his contributions on very trivial grounds. On one occasion he asked Reynolds to sit for his portrait. After one sitting Sir Joshua was obliged to leave London for the sake of his health. On his return he let Gainsborough know that he was back in Leicester Square. Gainsborough's only response was, that he was glad to hear Sir Joshua had recovered. He never again touched the portrait. The two were unsympathetic, but each felt the greatness of his rival, and bore witness to it in unprejudiced moments. Alluding to the deterioration of Reynolds's works, due to his injudicious experiments with pigments, Gainsborough declared that nevertheless "Sir Joshua's pictures in their most decayed state were better than those of any other artist when in their best." Sir Joshua's posthumous panegyric on his rival will be mentioned in its place. It must be confessed, too, that he did not always withhold his applause while that rival was still alive and active.

The exhibited works of Gainsborough, taking those which appeared at the Royal Academy and its forerunner, the Society of Arts, amount to but a few over a hundred. Of his productiveness, however, this gives no fair measure. A large proportion of his pictures never figured in the official exhibitions. As we have seen, a hiatus of four years occurs in the list of his contributions to the Academy, during the early part of his residence in London. Between 1777 and 1783 he contributed regularly, on one occasion sending as many as ten pictures. After 1783, for a reason to be given presently, his name disappears from the

catalogue. It is probable that the complete catalogue of his works would run to a total of seven or eight hundred.

Among the sitters who now flocked to Gainsborough's studio were famous beauties, such as Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, whom he had painted in 1763 as Miss Georgiana Spencer, a child of six years old, Mrs. Siddons, and Mrs. Sheridan; and men both of fashion and action, such as Colonel St. Leger, Colonel Tarleton, General Conway, Sir Harbord Harbord, Lord Cornwallis, Lord Sandwich, Lord Clive, Edmund Burke, Bishop Hurd, and Sheridan himself. Supreme as he was in the rendering of high-bred loveliness, Gainsborough's skill seems to some extent to have failed him in his two essays with the Duchess of Devonshire. He was dazzled rather than inspired by her beauty and vivacity, and declared despondently that "her Grace was too hard" for him. The first portrait was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1778. Walpole pronounced it "very bad and washy." Gainsborough was himself so little satisfied with it that he drew a wet brush across the mouth, refused to send it home to Chatsworth, and is said to have afterwards destroyed it. The second portrait appeared at the Royal Academy in 1783. It is generally assumed to be identical with the famous "lost *Duchess*," bought by Messrs. Agnew, at the Wynn Ellis sale of 1876, for £10,605, which was shortly afterwards cut out of the frame, and carried off by some still-undiscovered thief. Doubts, however, have been cast with some degree of probability, on the authenticity of this too famous portrait.

On the exquisite portrait of Mrs. Siddons, now in the National Gallery, the painter seems to have lavished more research than was usual with a painter of his extraordinary facility. The nose especially, he repeatedly altered, at last exclaiming in comic wrath: "Damn your nose, madam, there's no end to it!" In the softer loveliness of Mrs. Sheridan, "that beautiful mother of a beautiful race," the St. Cecilia of Reynolds, he found a type no less sympathetic than objectively perfect. He is scarcely to be seen to greater advantage than in his various portraits of her. If I had to select a single picture to represent Gainsborough, I think I should choose the small canvas at Knole, on which the painter has united the portraits of Maria Linley and her no less handsome brother.

The years 1775 and 1776, which followed Gainsborough's arrival in London, seem to have brought a large addition to his income. The only cloud was the death of his brother Humphrey, under circumstances already described. His letters to his sister, Mrs. Gibbon, dwell pleasantly on the details of his increasing prosperity. A coach was set up, which, however, was afterwards put down. In one of his letters the painter makes a sly allusion to the satisfaction of his wife and daughters in the new possession. "My family," he writes, "had a great desire to make a journey to Ipswich, to Mr. and Mrs. Kilderbee's, for a fortnight, and last Sunday morning I packed them off in their own coach, with David on horseback; and Molly (the younger of his two daughters) wrote to me to let me know that they arrived very safe—but somehow or other they seem desirous of returning rather sooner than the proposed time, as they desire me to go for them by next Tuesday; the bargain was that I should fetch them home. I don't know what's the matter; either people don't pay them honour enough for ladies that keep a coach, or else Madam is afraid to trust me alone in this great town."

The year 1777 was signalised by his return to the Academic fold. He exhibited some half dozen portraits and a large landscape. Among the portraits were whole-lengths of the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland, Lord Gage, and Abel, the musician; the latter, a fine work, which was afterwards in the possession of the Earl of Egremont. The catalogue for 1778 shows the largest number of pictures hitherto contributed; they included the first *Duchess of Devonshire*, and a fine portrait of Christie, the founder of the famous firm of auctioneers. In the following year a letter to Mrs. Gibbon says: "My present situation, with regard to encouragement, &c., is all that heart can wish, and I live at a full thousand pounds a year expense."

It is now pretty generally agreed that the famous *Blue Boy*, perhaps the most widely known of all Gainsboroughs, belongs to the year 1779, and that the tradition of its origin is authentic. The contention that it was painted so early as 1770 appears to rest on no more solid foundation than the fact that Gainsborough in that year contributed to the Royal Academy a *Portrait of a Young Gentleman*, to which Mary Moser, in a letter to Fuseli, thus alludes: "Gainsborough is beyond himself in a portrait of a gentleman in a Vandyke habit." Several

T. Gainsborough, R.A. Pinx. Walter I. Colls, Ph. Sc.

The Blue Boy.

other portraits are extant to which these words of the lady R.A. would apply. In the more popular version, which refers it to 1779, the picture figures as the painted refutation of a dictum of Sir Joshua's, and the story agrees so well with what we know of both men that we cling to our right of belief.

Gainsborough, influenced perhaps by the example of Vandyke, the master he admired above all others, had a great fondness for blue. In the majority of his better works the tint in question plays an important part. The most conspicuous exception I can call to mind is the *Mrs. Graham* at Edinburgh, where a warm crimson holds the place he so often gave to the cooler tint. In the *Lady Sheffield*, the *Mrs. Siddons*, the *Lady Bate Dudley*, the *Mrs. Beaufoy*, the *Duchess of Richmond*, and a host of others, blues of more or less coolness occupy the centre of the canvas. Nothing is more likely than that Reynolds had this peculiarity in his mind, when he laid down the following maxims in his celebrated "Eighth Discourse," delivered to the students of the Royal Academy in December, 1778 :—

"It ought, in my opinion, to be indispensably observed that the masses of light in a picture be always of a warm, mellow colour, yellow, red, or a yellowish white, and that the blue, the gray, or the green colours be kept almost entirely out of these masses, and be used only to support and set off these warm colours ; and for this purpose, a small proportion of cold colours will be found sufficient. Let this conduct be reversed : let the light be cold, and the surrounding colours warm, and it will be out of the power of art, even in the hands of Rubens or Titian, to make a picture splendid or harmonious."

It will be seen that Reynolds banishes to subordinate positions exactly the colours—blue, gray, and green—which had already been used by Gainsborough to focus many a masterpiece. The latter retorted by the superb bravura of *Master Buttall*, in which he showed that he, at all events, if not Rubens or Titian, could make a picture splendid and harmonious with a cold colour in its chief light. Knowing what we do of Reynolds, it seems to me almost certain that he had Gainsborough in his mind when he composed the above sentences, and that in provoking the *Blue Boy* he was actually hoist with his own *pétard*.

Gainsborough's model for the *Blue Boy* was Jonathan Buttall the

younger, the son of a rich wholesale ironmonger in Greek Street, Soho, for whom the artist painted several pictures. After the death of the younger Buttall, the picture was bought by a Mr. Nesbit. There is some obscurity as to its further vicissitudes, but it is believed to have passed from Nesbit to the Prince of Wales, who for some reason, handed it over to Hoppner the painter. Hoppner eventually sold it to Earl Grosvenor, from whom it has descended to the present Duke of Westminster. It is now in Grosvenor House, London.

The *Blue Boy* was perhaps not completed very early in the year, or, if it was, Gainsborough refrained from so pointed a challenge as its public exhibition would have involved. He was well represented at the Academy, however, by portraits of the Duchesses of Cumberland and Gloucester, of the Duke of Argyle and Judge Perrin, and by portraits of Two Ladies. In 1780, the year of the first exhibition at Somerset House, he contributed in all fifteen works: nine portraits, among them those of General Conway and the notorious editor of the *Morning Post*, "'Parson' Bate," afterwards Sir H. Bate Dudley, Bart.;[1] and six landscapes, for, though his portraits now divided the favour of the town with those of Reynolds and Romney, he had not forsaken his early love. Two or three of his rustic scenes always accompanied his other works to the Academy. But landscape was little tasted by the buying public of the day. Richard Wilson was, literally, selling his productions for bread and cheese. The greater number of Gainsborough's pastorals remained in his studio at his death. "They stood ranged in long lines from his hall to his painting-room," says Sir William Beechey, "and those who came to sit for their portraits rarely deigned to honour them with a look as they passed along." Gainsborough, in short, suffered the fate of most pioneers. He was the first English painter to reject all classic conventions, and frankly reproduce the beauty of his native land. "L'initiateur en paysage," says the writer who has perhaps done more than any other towards the recognition of the English School in France, "fut Gainsborough, qui anima ses vues de la campagne anglaise par des scènes rustiques ou des paysanneries. Morland et Constable procèdent de lui." Between these multitudinous "rustic scenes" it would be impossible to differentiate in the text. The apparent theme is constantly repeated with but slight

[1] Gainsborough painted a second picture of him in a landscape with his dog.

variation, the true subject being the rendering of some effect of light, of clouds, of masses of foliage. The examples perhaps most widely

Drawing of a Man.

known either by description or reproduction are the so-called *Cottage Door*, now in the collection of the Duke of Westminster; the *Cottage Girl with her Dog and Pitcher;* the two beautiful landscapes in the

National Gallery known as Gainsborough's *Forest* and *The Market Cart*; and *The Girl with Pigs*, a subject the artist repeated four times. The original, now in Lord Carlisle's collection at Castle Howard, was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1782, and was bought by Reynolds for one hundred guineas, the price fixed by the painter being only sixty. The *Shepherd Boy in a Shower*, and its pendant, the *Woodman in the Storm*, should also be named. The beauties of the last we can now judge only by prints and copies. Remaining in the artist's possession till his death, it was bought at his sale by Lord Gainsborough, and was destroyed when his house was burnt some years later. Two other landscapes are of interest, as being among the very few commissions Gainsborough received in this branch of his art. They were companion pieces, representing peasants returning from market, with waggons, etc., against a rich background of trees, and were painted for the Prince of Wales, who presented them to Mrs. Fitzherbert. For the pair Gainsborough is said to have received the then enormous price of two thousand guineas.

There were some, indeed, to whom Gainsborough's landscapes were something more than the triflings of a man of genius. The discerning few appreciated them, but this minority could not stem the tide of popular taste. Reynolds greatly admired his landscapes, "the grace of which," he said, "was not academical or antique, but selected from the great school of Nature." The President, who has been accused, not altogether without reason, of a pronounced hostility both to Wilson and Gainsborough, may in these praises have wrapped up an implied censure on the classicality of Wilson; he may also have insisted on Gainsborough's qualities as a landscape painter, with the idea that he thus somewhat discounted his rival's claims to equality with himself in the other *genre*. He is said to have greatly incensed Wilson at an Academy meeting, by pointedly proposing the health of Gainsborough as "the best living landscape painter," provoking from Wilson the famous retort: "and the best portrait painter too." But whatever may have been the motives underlying the President's admiration, he gave a substantial proof of sincerity by becoming a purchaser, as we have seen. Horace Walpole was also enthusiastic in his praises. The large landscape exhibited in 1777, he pronounced to be "in the style of Rubens, and by far the finest landscape ever painted in England, and

Portrait of a Lady.

equal to the great masters." That Caliban of criticism, Dr. Wolcot, better known as Peter Pindar, in a doggerel, "Ode to the Royal Academicians," paid Gainsborough the somewhat left-handed compliment of exhorting him to pursue his charming "forte" (*i.e.*, landscape), and leave portraits alone!

The year 1780 was marked by one of the few *contretemps* that disturbed the painter's family peace. Mention has been made of Johann Christian Fischer, the hautboy player, as one of the musicians whose society Gainsborough cultivated. A frequent guest, he had naturally been thrown much into contact with the painter's two beautiful daughters, and an attachment sprang up between him and the younger, Mary. It was not one which Gainsborough or his wife approved, not merely because of the suitor's position in life, but because he was known to be of an irritable and eccentric character. The parents were, however, overruled, and the marriage took place, but was not happy. The couple were separated after a few years. Mrs. Fischer's mind became unhinged. She suffered from curious delusions, one of which was that the Prince of Wales was in love with her. She survived both her parents and her unmarried sister, however, and died about 1825. Margaret, the elder daughter, seems to have had some touch of a similar infirmity, shown in strange peculiarities of temper. The taint is said to have been inherited from Mrs. Gainsborough, and to have manifested itself in her too at the close of her life.

In the following letter Gainsborough unburdened himself to his sister on the subject of the Fischer marriage:—

"*February* 23, 1780.

"Dear Sister,—I imagine you are by this time no stranger to the alteration which has taken place in my family. The notice I had of it was very sudden, as I had not the least suspicion of the attachment being so long and deeply settled; and as it was too late for me to alter anything, without being the cause of total unhappiness on both sides, my *consent*, which was a mere compliment to affect to ask, I needs must give; whether such a match was agreeable to me or not, I would not have the cause of unhappiness lie upon my conscience; and accordingly they were married last Monday, and are settled for the present in a ready-furnished

little house in Curzon-street, Mayfair. I can't say I have any reason to doubt the man's honesty or goodness of heart, as I never heard anyone speak anything amiss of him ; and as to his oddities and temper, she must learn to like those as she likes his person, for nothing can be altered now. I pray God she may be happy with him and have her health. Peggy has been very unhappy about it, but I endeavour to comfort her, in hope that she will have more pride and goodness than to do anything without first asking my advice and approbation. We shall see how they go on, and I shall write to you further upon the subject. I hope you are all well, and with best wishes,

"I remain your affectionate Brother,

"THOS. GAINSBOROUGH."

Of the years 1781 and 1782 little is recorded, its chief events being the pictures finished and exhibited—portraits of the King and Queen and of Bishop Hurd, *A Shepherd*, and the usual landscapes (three), in the former year ; in the latter, portraits of Colonel Tarleton, Miss Dalrymple, Madame Baccelli, several Ladies and Gentlemen, and the companion pair of the Prince of Wales and one of his boon companions, Colonel St. Leger, painted to be exchanged by the two sitters. That of the Colonel is now at Hampton Court. The landscapes were the *Girl and Pigs* and one other.

Gainsborough was greatly excited about this time by an exhibition of moving pictures got up by the painter, Philip de Loutherbourg, to illustrate the scenery of Great Britain. The *Eidophusikon*, as the Anglo-Alsatian called it, seems to have *émotionné* his fellow Academician much in the same way as a fine violin. He instantly set about making a small imitation, for which he painted with his own hand a series of landscapes on glass. These were only a few inches square, but they were executed with great delicacy and skill, and when properly shown as transparencies in a darkened room, must have had a charming effect. The machine with its slides was at the exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1885, and was afterwards in the possession of a London dealer. Two of the slides have been etched by Mons. Brunet Debaines.

In 1783, the last year of his appearance at the Royal Academy, Gainsborough was represented by no less than twenty-six pictures.

Portrait of Mrs. Siddons.

Fifteen of the number were portraits (heads only) of the Royal family —the King and Queen, the Prince of Wales, Prince William, the Princess Royal, Prince Edward, Princess Augusta, Princess Elizabeth, Prince Ernest, Prince Augustus Frederick, Prince Adolphus, Princess Mary, Princess Sophia, Prince Octavius, and Prince Alfred. Such a galaxy must have sadly tried the temper of Sir Joshua. Among the other portraits were the second *Duchess of Devonshire* and the *Mrs. Sheridan*, already referred to, *Lord Cornwallis*, the *Duke of Northumberland*, and *Lord Sandwich*. The list was varied by *A Landscape*, and a *paysannerie* representing *Two Shepherd Boys, with Fighting Dogs*. No wonder that after such continuous labour the painter felt the need of a holiday. He started off with his friend Mr. Kilderbee for a trip to the Cumberland lakes, seeking refreshment in the study of new scenes. "I purpose to mount all the lakes at the next exhibition, in the great style," he wrote to a friend just before starting. But in "the next exhibition" Gainsborough was conspicuous only by his absence. Among the works sent in for it was his famous group of George III.'s daughters—the Princess Royal, Princess Augusta, and Princess Elizabeth. It had been painted for Carlton House, for a specified place on the panelled walls of one of the state-rooms, and its execution had been determined to some extent by its destination. By the rules of the Royal Academy no full-length portrait is allowed to hang on the line. But Gainsborough, solicitous for his masterpiece and conscious that much of its delicate charm would be lost by undue elevation, not unreasonably put in a plea that an exception might, on this occasion, be made in his favour. He even, says a contemporary newspaper, agreed to accept inferior positions for his other contributions, on condition that this particular picture had some indulgence shown it. Taking into account the distinction both of artist and sitters, the great beauty of the work, and the open secret of the rivalry between Gainsborough and the President, especially as regards Court patronage, it would have been no less graceful than magnanimous if the Council had given way in the matter. But they were inexorable, and Gainsborough, greatly angered, withdrew the whole of his contributions, and could never again be prevailed upon to send a picture to the Royal Academy. He has been much censured for his conduct in this respect. But it must be allowed that he was ungenerously treated, more

especially as it seems quite certain that the rule in question was not always so rigorously enforced. To console himself for his isolation, he opened an exhibition at his own house, an experiment which seems to have had little success. A more efficacious medicine for his wounded feelings was found in a summer visit to his native borough, where his fine clothes, his cocked hat, his good look , and gay manners delighted his former intimates.

Gainsborough retained his affection for the country throughout his London career, but his constant occupation made it difficult for him to enjoy its pleasures. In the summer he was obliged to content himself with lodgings at Richmond or at Hampstead, where he spent his time in sketching out of doors, or in beguiling young rustics to pose as models. It was at Richmond he captured the handsome peasant boy, Jack Hill, who figures in so many of his landscapes. He received this lad into his house, and promised to provide for his future. But the young gipsy proved an ungrateful *protégé*.

In the four years of life that remained to him after his rupture with the Academy, Gainsborough's powers showed no hint of decay. His art indeed seems to have touched its highest point of development in one or two examples from this time. The portrait of Mrs. Siddons was painted in 1784, the *View of the Mall in St. James's Park* in 1786, the *Woodman in the Storm* in 1787. The exact dates of *The Cottage Door* and the *Cottage Girl with her Dog and Pitcher* are not known, but they also belong to this last period.

The *Mrs. Siddons* is perhaps too well known to need description. It is often called the painter's masterpiece, and in certain qualities it has never been surpassed. The drawing, especially, has a decision not common in Gainsborough's work ; the design is unusually well digested —to use a graphic if uncomfortable term—and the colour is in parts superb. Unfortunately the red curtain in the background is not absolutely in tune with the blues and buffs of the lady's costume. Possibly this may be due to changes in the pigments, although I do not think so. I fancy rather that Gainsborough was not very sure of himself when red was in question. Several other pictures could be named in which that tint is not quite at peace with the cooler ones about it. In spite, however, of this little blemish, the distinction—so marvellously

rendered—of the sitter, the fine design, and the exquisite colour of its more important parts, make the picture in the National Gallery one of the greatest portraits of women ever painted. Nearly forty years ago, when it was at the Manchester Exhibition of 1857, it moved the late Théophile Thoré to write of it thus :—

"Le profil, dessiné avec la plus fière assurance, a quelque chose de

The Watering Place.

sibyllin, de fatalement passionné. La grande tragédienne, qui traduisait les passions avec tant d'énergie et de sensibilité, et qui les éprouvait si vivement pour son compte, est mieux rendue dans ce simple portrait à mi-corps et en négligé, que dans ses portraits allégoriques en muse tragique ou sous les déguisements de ses rôles d'actrice. Ce portrait est si original, si individuel, comme expression de caractère poétique,

comme parti pris de tournure, comme audace de couleur, comme liberté de touche, qu'il ne resemble à la peinture d'aucun maître. On a beau lui chercher des analogues, on n'en trouve point : Véronèse, un peu. Mais non, c'est une création toute singulière. Voilà du génie ! Il faudrait au Louvre cette Mrs. Siddons, avec Miss O'Brien ! "[1]

As for the *View in the Mall, St. James's Park*, it is no hyperbole to say with Hazlitt that it rivals Watteau in his happiest moments—"all in motion and flutter like a lady's fan." Among the trees and benches of the park a fashionable assembly groups itself round the central figures of the Royal party. In execution the picture combines the beauties of such a portrait as that *Mrs. Beaufoy* which Mr. Alfred de Rothschild has so kindly allowed us to reproduce in these pages, and such a landscape as the *Watering Place* of the National Gallery, or the *Cottage Door*, at Grosvenor House, or the superb *Harvest Waggon*, which was offered at Christie's some few weeks ago by Mr. Gibbons. The *View in the Mall* is the artistic temperament made visible.

In 1787 Gainsborough seems to have had one of those strange premonitions of approaching death, of which so many instances are asserted. Allan Cunningham, who is responsible for the story, shall give his own version of it :—

"Though Gainsborough was not partial to the society of literary men, he seems to have been acquainted with Johnson and Burke ; and he lived on terms of great affection with Richard Brinsley Sheridan. He was also a welcome visitor at the table of Sir George Beaumont, a gentleman of graceful manners, who lived in old English dignity, and was besides a lover of literature and a painter of landscape. The latter loved to relate a curious anecdote of Gainsborough, which marks the unequal spirits of the man, and shows that he was the slave of wayward impulses which he could neither repress nor command. Sir George Beaumont, Sheridan, and Gainsborough had dined together, and the latter was more than usually pleasant and witty. The meeting was so much to their mutual satisfaction that they agreed to have another day's happiness, and accordingly an early day was named when they should dine again together. They met; but a cloud had descended upon the spirit of Gainsborough, and he sat silent, with a look of fixed melancholy

[1] W. Burger, *Trésors d'Art en Angleterre*, p. 388.

Mrs. Sheridan and Mrs. Tickell.

which no wit could dissipate. At length he took Sheridan by the hand, led him out of the room, and said, 'Now, don't laugh, but listen. I shall die soon—I know it—I feel it—I have less time to live than my looks infer; but for this I care not. What oppresses my mind is this: I have many acquaintances and few friends; and as I wish to have one worthy man to accompany me to the grave, I am desirous of bespeaking you—will you come? Ay or no?' Sheridan could scarcely repress a smile as he made the required promise; the looks of Gainsborough cleared up like the sunshine of one of his own landscapes; throughout the rest of the evening his wit flowed and his humour ran over, and the minutes, like those of the poet, winged their way with pleasure."

In 1788 began the memorable trial of Warren Hastings, in Westminster Hall. Gainsborough and Reynolds were among the spectators of that unparalleled scene. Gainsborough, whose seat was near an open window, suddenly felt something like the touch of an icy hand on his neck. On returning home, he complained of pain, and spoke to his wife and niece of the occurrence. Examining the part afflicted, they found a mark about the size of a shilling. Doctors were consulted, among them the famous physician, Sir John Hunter. They pronounced the lump to be merely a swelling of the glands, due to a chill. The swelling increased, however, and became more painful, and Dr. Hunter was obliged reluctantly to admit that the growth was malignant. "If this be a cancer," said the painter, "I am a dead man." He immediately began to set his affairs in order, and to prepare for the end. He had amassed nothing to be called a fortune, having spent and given freely in his lifetime, but he was able to make a sufficient provision for his wife and daughters.

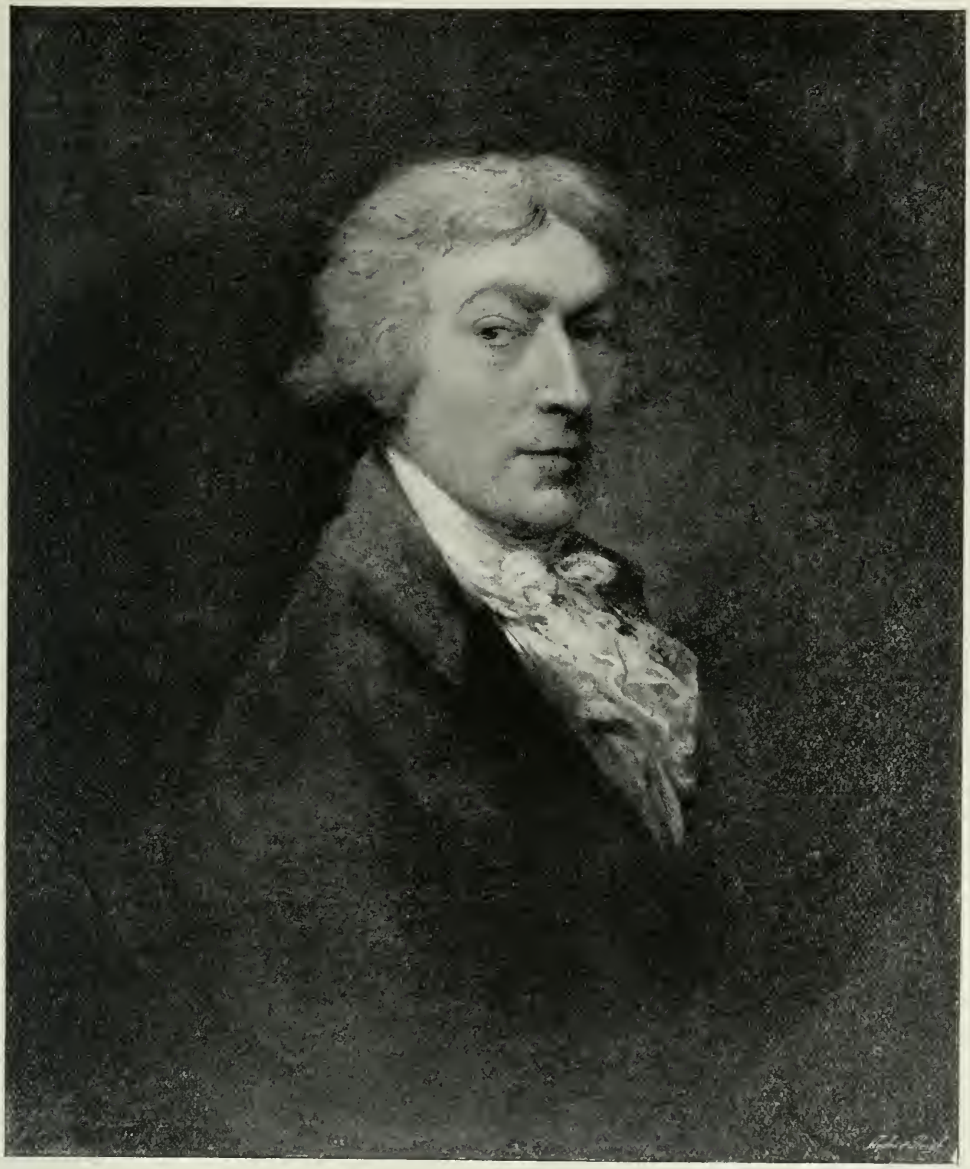
By July, the disease had made great progress, and Gainsborough felt the near approach of death. Looking back upon his career with the clear-sightedness of one who has no further part in the struggle, he recognised that he had not been altogether blameless in his conduct towards his great rival. He wrote to Reynolds, begging him to come and bid him goodbye. Sir Joshua's description of their interview is full of pathos:—

"If any little jealousies had subsisted between us they were forgotten, in those moments of sincerity; and he turned towards me as

one who was engrossed by the same pursuits, and who deserved his good opinion, by being sensible of his excellence."

His regret, he told Reynolds, was chiefly that he must leave his art, especially as he had now come to understand his own shortcomings, and, in his latest works, to correct them in a great measure. "We are all going to heaven, and Vandyke is of the company," he whispered, as Sir Joshua took leave of him. He died a few days after the interview, on the 2nd August, 1788. By his own wish, he was buried in Kew churchyard, near the grave of his friend Joshua Kirby. His nephew, Gainsborough Dupont, was chief mourner. The pall-bearers were Reynolds, West, Sir William Chambers, Bartolozzi, Paul Sandby, and Francis Cotes, and among those who followed him to the grave were Linley the musician, Mrs. Sheridan's brother, and Sheridan himself, true to his promise. His wife, who survived him rather more than ten years, was buried in the same grave, where Gainsborough Dupont was also laid in 1797. The pictures remaining in his studio at his death, were arranged, catalogued, and for a time exhibited at Schomberg House.

With Gainsborough's rank and claims as an artist, I propose to deal in a separate chapter. As a man, all we learn of him tends to prove him singularly happy and lovable in disposition, warm-hearted, generous, impulsive, and subject to those not unamiable weaknesses that are the usual defects of such qualities. Thus we are told that he was often imposed upon, that he gave money recklessly, and lavished the treasures of his brush on people who had no appreciation of their value. One such recipient is said to have papered a dressing-room with sketches. Thicknesse considered that "Of all men I ever knew, he possessed least of that worldly knowledge to enable him to make his own way into the notice of the great world." But this was surely rather a virtue than a failing! His most serious fault seems to have been a hot and hasty temper, swift to resent such offences as Reynolds, for example, would have affected to ignore. On one occasion he dashed a wet brush across the face of a finished portrait in his vexation at hearing an arrogant sitter inquire whether "that fellow Gainsborough" had finished his picture. A pompous lord, who desired him not to overlook the dimple in his chin, was dismissed with a forcible "Damn the dimple in your chin! I



Portrait of Gainsborough.

From the Picture in the possession of the Royal Academy of Arts.

shall paint neither the one nor the other!" Happy the man to whose charge no graver vices than these can be laid!

"In person," says Cunningham, "he was eminently handsome, and when he wished to please, no one had in greater perfection a ready grace and persuasive manner—gifts that cannot be acquired." Several portraits of himself bear out the former assertion. One, which was in his studio at his death, was presented by his daughter to the Royal Academy, and is here reproduced.

THE MAN GAINSBOROUGH.

The character of Gainsborough seems quite transparent. Little as we know of a daily life which was too uneventful to tempt a chronicler, that little leaves us in no sort of doubt as to the class to which his personality belonged. He offers an almost ideal example of what used to be thought the artistic temperament *par excellence*. He was gay, careless, reckless even at times, with an irresponsibility of tongue which sometimes got him into scrapes. His disposition was as far removed from the critical as it could well be. In his letters we scarcely find a remark implying any desire to judge his fellow men or their works. He was content to play through life, enjoying beauty wherever he found it, and creating it whenever he could. Almost the only instance we can quote of any spoken stricture of his is the unlucky remark, made in the presence of an attorney, that not one lawyer in ten was worth hanging. He bubbled over with a shrewd humour, and enjoyed a reputation for repartee which we have now to take mostly on trust. One story quoted by Fulcher gives us some idea of his sense of fun. An old gray-headed tailor, called Fowler, sometimes sat to Gainsborough, on whose chimneypiece, among other curiosities, stood a beautiful preparation of an infant cranium, given to the Painter by a surgeon friend. "Fowler, without moving his position, continually peered at it askance, with inquisitive eye. 'Ah! Master Fowler,' said the Painter, 'that is a mighty curiosity.' 'What might it be, sir, if I may make so bold?' 'A whale's eye,' replied Gainsborough. 'No, no; never say so, Muster Gainsborough. Sir! it is a little child's skull!' 'You have hit it,' said the wag. 'Why, Fowler, you're a witch! But what will you think when I tell

you that it is the skull of Julius Cæsar when he was a little boy ! !' 'Laws,' cried Fowler, 'what a phenomenon !' Foolery, perhaps, but ready foolery, with the true *vis comica* in it. His often quoted 'repartee to a barrister,' when under cross-examination, is ready enough, but, unluckily, its logic is not entirely sound. 'I observe, Mr. Gainsborough, that you lay great stress on a "painter's eye." What do you mean by that expression ?' 'A painter's eye,' answered Gainsborough, 'is to him what a lawyer's tongue is to you.'" Repartees should illuminate as well as crush. Unfortunately this one only fulfils the latter function.

That the coarseness into which Gainsborough's humour occasionally tumbled was not the result of vicious inclinations, but rather of a love of fun, and the conviction, which he has shared with so many others, that a spice of indecency—like an oath—is a great ornament to conversation, seems to be proved by what we know of his life. In his youth, or rather in his boyhood, he confesses, "he was deeply read in petticoats." Like most of his contemporaries, he could drink—and yet his biographers, frank as they are, tell us nothing to his discredit in either of these directions. In one of his own letters, indeed, he suggests that Mrs. Gainsborough's early return from what was intended to be a long visit to her native shire, was due to her distrust of how he might behave himself in this great wicked city alone. Fulcher speaks of his infirmity of temper, and contrasts him in that particular with the placid Reynolds. But all the instances of irritability to which we can point are merely additional proofs of his sensitive, highly strung, and to some extent irresponsible nature. The desire to wound seems to have been quite foreign to his nature, and when he quarrelled, a look was usually enough to bring about a reconciliation. With Reynolds alone does he seem to have persistently sulked. The President's character was about as diametrically opposed to his as the limits of healthy human nature allow. Where the one man was all foresight, judgment and imperturbability, the other was *insouciance*, impulse, and excitement. In the picture of Sir Joshua's interior, we find but a single detail which might be supposed to appeal to Gainsborough, and that is the open table, with its provision for six out of a dozen uninvited guests. The two men were, in fact, antipathetic ; the personality of each created discomfort in the other, and Gainsborough being the franker of the pair, the blame for

their quarrels—if we may call them quarrels—has come to rest mainly upon him. This view of Gainsborough's personality is confirmed by the fact that of all the men of "light and leading" of the time, the only one to whom he seems to have been instinctively drawn was Sheridan.

"In person," says Fulcher, "Gainsborough was handsome, of a fair complexion, regular features, tall, and well-proportioned. His forehead, though not high, was broad and strongly marked, his nose Roman, his mouth and eye denoting humour and refinement; the general expression of his face thoughtful, yet not altogether pleasant. The most casual observer would have seen that much lay there; one gifted with greater insight would have said also, that something was wanting there; few could have affirmed what." The head reproduced on page 65 is clearly that of one with more than a touch of caprice and its accompaniment, an uncertain temper. The expression is that of a dog whom one caresses, not carelessly, but with one's vigilance alert. It may return the caress, or it may snap, but from apprehension rather than ill temper.

Before attempting an estimate of Gainsborough's art, it may be well, perhaps, to quote a few of the anecdotes which confirm this sketch of his character. His generosity rests upon a hundred stories. He gave away both money and pictures lavishly. He gave twenty drawings to one female barbarian who *pasted* them on the walls of her dressing-room Colonel Hamilton got the famous *Boy at the Stile* for a solo on the violin. Wiltshire, the carrier, earned a gallery of pictures by a few lifts in his waggon. Sometimes Gainsborough's impulsiveness in this way ran away with him. At Mr. Agar's he saw the *Velasquez* now in the Dulwich Gallery. "Tell your master," he said to the servant, "that I will give him a thousand pounds for that picture." The offer was promptly accepted, when the painter was obliged to confess he could afford no such sum.

The story of Sir Joshua's portrait has been already told. Northcote tells us that Gainsborough once said that "Sir Joshua's pictures in their most decayed state were better than those of any other artist at their best." Going through the Academy with Sir George Beaumont, and examining one Reynolds after another, Gainsborough exclaimed, glancing at the galaxy of canvases, "Damn him! How various he is!"

The heat of his impulses was never better shown than in his dealings with the little gipsy, John Hill, "a boy on whom nature had bestowed

Madame Baccelli.

more than an ordinary share of good looks, with an intelligence rarely found in a woodman's cottage. Gainsborough looked at the boy with a painter's eye, and acting as usual from the impulse of the moment, offered to take him home and provide for his future welfare. Jack Hill, as Gainsborough always called him, was at once arrayed in his Sunday best and sent with the gentleman, laden with as many virtuous precepts as would 'have filled a copy-book.' Mrs. Gainsborough was delighted with the boy, and the young ladies equally rejoiced in such a good-looking addition to their establishment. Mrs. Fischer, indeed, talked of adopting him. But whether, like the wild Indian of the prairie, Jack pined for the unrestrained freedom of his native woods—the blackberries and the roasted sloes; or, what is more likely, feared chastisement for his many ungrateful doings, after a brief trial, he ran away, and though brought back and forgiven by his kind-hearted master, he wilfully threw away a much better chance than Dick Whittington started with on his romantic journey to the thrice-repeated City sovereignty. At Gainsborough's death his widow kindly procured for Jack an admission into Christ's Hospital. Here we lose sight of the boy; he is, however, immortalised by the Painter's pencil, and amongst all Gainsborough's studies of peasant children, Jack is distinguished by his personal beauty."

The story already alluded to of Colonel Hamilton's solo is so graphically told by Smith, in his life of Nollekens, that I must quote it here :—" Upon our arrival at Mr. Gainsborough's, the artist was listening to a violin, and held up his finger to Mr. Nollekens as a request for silence. Colonel Hamilton (who was not only looked upon as one of the first of amateur violin players, but also one of the first of gentlemen pugilists) was playing to him in so exquisite a style, that Gainsborough exclaimed, 'Now, my dear Colonel, if you will but go on, I will give you that picture of the *Boy at the Stile*, which you have so often wished to purchase of me.' Mr. Gainsborough, not knowing how long Nollekens would hold his tongue, gave him a book of sketches to choose two from which he had promised him. As Gainsborough's versatile fancy was at this period devoted to music, his attention was so riveted to the tones of the violin, that for nearly half an hour he was motionless; after which the Colonel requested that a hackney-coach might be sent for, wherein he carried off the picture. Mr. Gainsborough, after he had given

Mr. Nollekens the two drawings he had selected, requested him to look at a model of an ass's head which he had just made. 'You should model more with your thumbs,' observed Nollekens; 'thumb it about till you get it into shape.' 'What,' said Gainsborough, 'in this manner?' having taken up a bit of clay, and looking at a picture of Abel's Pomeranian dog which hung over the chimney-piece,—'this way?' 'Yes,' said Nollekens, 'you'll do a great deal more with your thumbs.' Mr. Gainsborough, by whom I was standing, observed to me, 'You enjoyed the music, my little fellow, and I am sure you long for this model; there, I will give it to you;' and I am delighted with it still." These stories help to complete the picture of a man who must have been loved by those admitted to his intimacy.

As a painter Gainsborough was the artistic temperament made visible. It would not be rash to call him both the first and the best of the impressionists. In every task he set himself his aim was purely pictorial. He felt no temptation to be literary, to be anecdotic, to be didactic, to be anything but artistic within the limits marked out by his own emotions and the materials he was using. His pictures are examples of pure reaction between object and subject, and their value depends more, perhaps, than in the case of any other man, on the quality of the senses of which they are so sincere an outcome. With Reynolds deliberation counted for much; Gainsborough's good things are impromptus We might almost say that when he deliberated he was lost. A sympathetic sitter seems to have had power at once to evoke a creation from his brain. In the *Mrs. Siddons*, the *Mrs. Graham*, the *Lady Sheffield*, the *Lady Mulgrave*, the *Baccelli*, the *Mrs. Beaufoy*, the *Lord Archibald Campbell*, and a host more, there is no sign of preparation. The conception as we see it is the conception as it first offered itself to Gainsborough. In things like the *Baillie Family*, where the problem was too complex to be grasped as a whole, we have a corresponding failure. This group can be divided into three or four parts, each complete in itself. The two children on our left make one picture; the mother and her infant, a second; the father leaning on the chair, a third. The same fault, no doubt, can be found with most large groups of portraits, but in Gainsborough the dislocation is both more obvious than with other men of similar rank, and more clearly due to inability to make thought

do the work of inspiration. When Reynolds had to paint the Marlborough family he failed to contrive an incident which should bring them all within the circle of one idea. In fact it is difficult to think of any one except Rembrandt who has absolutely succeeded in that very difficult task, and he only did it twice. But by dint of thought Sir Joshua did manage to make all his persons contribute to the *arabesque*. You could not take a figure from his canvas without spoiling the rest. Looking at a Gainsborough you feel instinctively that if he had been compelled, by some *force majeure*, to think, he would have been literally hurt. Put the right stimulus before him, in the shape of a pretty woman, a lovely scene in nature, any sensuous passage of life, and a lovely piece of art would be the certain reaction. But I doubt whether he ever felt the slightest temptation to realize on canvas any scene, or action, or emotion he had read of in a book. His brain answered with marvelious celerity and purity to a stimulus received through the eye, but the incubatory process was altogether foreign to its nature.

Some critics have professed to see in Gainsborough a landscape rather than a portrait painter. One biographer goes so far as to declare that "those critics who had any discernment thought his landscapes superior to his portraits." It is not difficult to understand how such an idea, mistaken as it is, came to be formed. Gainsborough was not a draughtsman. He did not love Ingres' *probité de l'art* for its own sake. Drawing belongs to those preparatory elements in art which never appealed to him. Not that he couldn't draw. In his boyhood and youth he drew carefully and well, undergoing absolute pain, one would think, in the winning of such accuracy as we see in the two pencil heads from Dublin (pages 12, 13), and in the much later *Parish Clerk* (page 16). But, speaking generally, the silhouettes or linear proportions of things did not stir his fancy. It was with mass, colour, tone that he produced his effects. Now, the human eye is very easily trained to perceive faults in the drawing of the human figure. We all of us have an instinctive knowledge of how long legs and arms, necks and noses ought to be, and when liberties are taken in those directions we are quick in abuse. With landscape it is different. Few people have observed the structure of the ground, the build and curves of trees, the characteristic

forms of clouds, with the precision of Mr. Ruskin. In short, a deficiency which did something to lessen the pleasure received from Gainsborough's portraits was not perceived in his landscapes, although it was there in even greater measure; and so critics, who were unable to distinguish between the representative and the artistic elements of his work, put the latter on a higher plane than the former. This idea has been confirmed this summer by the treatment meted out to one of his finest portraits, the *Duchess of Richmond*, lent to the "Fair Women" exhibition by Mr. Leopold de Rothschild. In general arrangement, in colour, in all that makes for decorative unity and force, it is one of the master's finest productions. Unfortunately the lady's right arm is much too long and rather straight and stiff. This defect was pounced upon at once, and every attempt to praise the picture for what it was —perhaps the finest piece of pure *art* in the whole show—was met with the objection, "That arm! Why, it is a foot too long!" It is as if we refused to admire a song of Burns's because it had a false concord in the middle.

In his early years Gainsborough painted landscape with the minutest care. I know pictures dating probably from about 1748, which excel any Dutchman in the elaboration with which such things as the ruts in a country road and the grasses beside it, or the gnarled trunk and rough bark of some ancient willow, are made out. In the National Gallery of Ireland we have one such canvas. It represents just such a characteristic bit of Suffolk scenery as Wynants would have chosen had he carried his Batavian patience over the North Sea. Across a sand-pit in the foreground a deep country road winds away into the distance, where the roofs of a village suggest its objective. An old horse, a silvery sky with a fine *arabesque* of windy clouds, and a few old weather-stunted trees complete the picture. The execution is so elaborate that the surface is fused into one unbroken breadth of enamel. The tones are high and even, the colour cool, almost to excess, the design youthfully symmetrical. The *Great Cornard Wood*, in the National Gallery, cannot have been painted very much later than this. Its colour has the same gray coolness, its tone is as high and its execution almost as elaborate. The spirit of the work is still essentially representative and imitative. It was not until much later that the personally expressive element began to dominate its author's

work. As long as he remained in Suffolk he seems to have been rather the student than the creator. It was in 1758 that he wrote the letter to an unidentified attorney in Colchester, in which he defends the roughness of his paint, but the supposed defect must have been very slight, for even after he left Ipswich we find him still painting smoothly and with solicitude for the fusion of his touch.

The impatience, which was one of his defects, betrays itself, I think, in the large number of unfinished pictures which have come down to us from these Suffolk days. Perhaps his employers were not exacting ; perhaps, even in portraiture, most of his work was uncommissioned. However that may be, unfinished portraits and portrait groups in his early manner exist in scores. Even in their incompletion they show how carefully Gainsborough laid the foundations on which his future breadth and freedom of eye and hand were to be built.

During these preparatory years, Gainsborough often made use of a red ground, a practice learnt no doubt from his favourite, Jan Wynants (who must surely, one thinks, have been a " Hobson's choice "). Those who haunt auction rooms and other places where they sell, continually come across small canvases, often very red in tone, on which hedgerow trees overshadow small groups of people, old white horses, donkeys, stiles, and other rural *impedimenta*. When the figures are of considerable size, the heads are well modelled and the draperies well cast, but the motives are apt to be artificial and the general results slightly prophetic of the ways of the modern photographer. These are *débris* from Gainsborough's time at Ipswich, and occasionally they have a charm which, in its own way, is as personal and penetrating as that of a masterpiece from their author's years of glory. I particularly remember a small portrait group, " Mr. and Mrs. Pond," which combined a most dainty precision of brush with every sort of evidence you could ask for of the painter's sincerity and delight in his task. Such a picture as this was conceived and realised in the true spirit of the eighteenth century. It is in painting what the *Spectator* is in letters : graceful, concise, idyllic in scent if not in constitution, materialistic in a sweet, unconscious sort of way, clean, and scholarly. The passion, the sense of infinity, the gorgeous imagination which is content to send you questing down the same glow-

ing line as itself, none of these notes of Gainsborough's later life are even foreshadowed. Those whose experience has convinced them that all great artists, with hardly an exception, have grown from work like this to their

The Maypole.

definitive power, will hope much from such a picture ; to others it will seem the last word of a sweet but narrow soul.

Gainsborough blossomed at Bath. There, for the first time, his art became more personal than objective. The demands of a busy town, the

temptations of society, the increase in his *clientèle* for portraits, made it more difficult than before to get away into the fields to study nature. The knowledge acquired in the East was put under contribution, and the painter began to depend mainly on his accumulated impressions. In all probability he now first made the acquaintance of Vandyck. All round Bath there are great houses filled with the masterpieces of the Anglo-Flemish knight, and although we have no direct testimony to refer to, internal evidence points strongly to the truth of such an assumption.[1] Thicknesse might here be of use. Through his family connections he would be able to get the *entrée* for his friend where the latter's talent would be an insufficient passport. Vandyck's backgrounds influenced Gainsborough as much as his figures. Granting that I am right in my suppositions, it will be from his first migration that we must date Gainsborough's characteristic style in landscape as well as in portraiture. Several of Vandyck's landscape studies are still extant. Mr. George Scharf believes that one in the Print Room of the British Museum was used for the background of the Blenheim *Charles I.*, now in the National Gallery. To me this seems by no means certain, but at least the drawing, slight as it is, shows that Vandyck anticipated Gainsborough's way of looking at fields and trees, if he did not actually suggest it.

The Stratford portrait of Garrick, the *Lady Ray* (page 22), the *Parish Clerk*, and the landscapes reproduced on pages 19 and 35, all belong to the Bath period. The *Parish Clerk* was probably the first in point of time. It shows a good deal of the timidity of his early years, and is quite free from the delight in his own powers of brush, which makes, for instance, the handling of the crimson dress in the *Lady Ray* so remarkable. In 1768 Gainsborough wrote a letter to Garrick in which he described a conception for a portrait of Shakespeare, which he had been obliged to abandon through inability to carry it out. "I was willing," he writes, "like an ass as I am, to expose myself a little out of the simple portrait way, and had a notion of showing where that

[1] Gainsborough made, from memory, a reduced copy of the Great Vandyck at Wilton House, the *Family of the Earl of Pembroke*. I have not seen it, but C. R. Leslie ventures to say it is, to his mind, "much finer than the original, in its present state," and "I think (he goes on) it possible it may have some finer qualities than the original possessed in any state."

inimitable poet had his ideas from, by an immediate ray darting down upon his eye turned up for the purpose." We may be sure that if Gainsborough had carried out this notion it would not have seemed so funny in paint as it does in words. He had, in fact, already used a somewhat similar idea for his *Parish Clerk*, and that with complete felicity. The old man is looking up from the large open Bible to where the sunlight is pouring down through the window upon his venerable head. Of all Gainsborough's pictures this is, perhaps, the most careful, the most caressing, if I may be allowed the word, in design. The flow of every line, the accent of every mass, has been pondered and re-pondered until the unity, if not the force, of Rembrandt has been reached.

If we may take our faith in both hands and trust to internal evidence, it was between the production of the *Parish Clerk* and the next on our list of Bath pictures that Gainsborough was introduced to Vandyck. In the *Lady Ray* his old solicitude over detail survives in parts, especially in the painting of the lace and flowers. But the conception has the *insouciance* of Vandyck, and in the treatment of the crimson silk the effect of his example is unmistakable. Hitherto Gainsborough had dwelt upon the fall and fold of draperies. Henceforward he makes them mainly the vehicle for fine colour. His technic is the Fleming's with a difference. Gainsborough's hand was lighter than Vandyck's, and his taste in colour more luminous, airy, and transparent. But both men won their effects by sometimes over-sharp oppositions between the cool lights of their silks and satins and the glowing, transparent shadows in the crumpled folds. Perhaps the finest piece of colour created by Vandyck in this country is the *Charles I.*, now in the Salon Carré of the Louvre. Without the sheen and *finesse* of a fine Gainsborough, it has the elements out of which all his best qualities as a technical painter were developed. It has, too, like everything else by the Flemish master, the distinction won by dwelling only on those details of *allure* which make for that quality.

Here again Gainsborough seems to have been awakened by Vandyck to fresh possibilities in the art he practised. Sincerity had been his governing virtue in Suffolk. The people he had painted there were

homely, healthy, bucolic, and so he had shown them. A boy fresh from Hayman's studio would be satisfied with their comeliness. His ambition might well aim no higher than to record it at its best. But when, after ten years of happy drudgery, he moved away to new scenes and there fell into the society of the ladies and cavaliers of Vandyck, new horizons would open before him. He would perceive, for the first time, what selection could do, and how a greater race of men and women than he had dreamt of lay among the tints on his palette. Gainsborough was a rarer genius than Vandyck. His art is more personal, more exquisite, more alive with temperament, than the Fleming's. But he required a spur. Many things in his life show that he lacked initiative ; his delay in Suffolk, his contentment with Bath when he might have had London, his indifference to other countries and their doings, all these point to a nature which did not instinctively seek or experiment. We know he scarcely ever opened a book. It is quite possible that in those days of no public collections and no exhibitions, he may have lived to the age of thirty without ever having seen a picture by Vandyck or any one else which could drive his thoughts beyond the realism in which he had been trained. To us who have the finest gallery in the world at our doors, who have every winter a new selection of masterpieces to study, who can keep ourselves at least moderately *au fait* with what is being done at the moment through the Academy and the other summer exhibitions, it is difficult to realize in what isolation a painter might work in the eighteenth century. A man who was as delighted as Gainsborough with the example of a second-rate Dutchman cannot have been familiar with the really great old masters, and so one need not wonder that, when Vandyck first swam into his ken, a new era opened for his art.

Between Gainsborough at Bath and Gainsborough in London there is no sharp line of demarcation. Vandyck once found remained our painter's load-star to the end. "We are all going to Heaven, and Vandyck is of the company," he whispered on his death-bed. The effect upon him of the capital was to enrich his manner, to develop his personality, to give him a confidence in himself which he did not feel in the same degree while remote from the centre of things. In London his brush became more bold, his impasto richer, his colour more original

in its combinations, and more personal. Towards the end of his life we find signs that he had made the acquaintance of Rubens and Titian. Some of his last landscapes especially remind us of such things as the *Farm at Laeken*, of Sir Peter Paul, and the *Shepherds in a Storm*, of Vecelli. But of this influence he was probably unconscious, and his main development from first to last was determined by the impressions received from the first great artist with whom he came in contact.

Take as typical examples of Gainsborough's London period, the following six pictures :—*The Blue Boy* (1779), *Mrs. Beaufoy* (1780), *Colonel St. Leger* (1782), *Mrs. Siddons* (1784), and *The Mall, St. James's Park* (1786). Contrasted with the best works of his Bath time, all these show a larger handling, a richer substance, a more concentrated conception, a completer self-dependence. But there is no difference in kind between any one of them and, for instance, Wiltshire's *Hay Wain*. Such alteration as there is is strictly development, a development due in the main to the knowledge their author had acquired, that his powers and ideas were as good as those of any possible rival. The painter of the *Mrs. Beaufoy*, the *Mrs. Siadons*, and *The Mall*—my favourites among the pictures quoted—must have known that his fame had little to fear, even from that of Sir Joshua, and that nothing was wanted for a triumphant success but truth to himself. The *Mall*, especially, seems to me the finest picture in its own class ever painted. And that class includes all the Watteaus, to say nothing of the Lancrets, and Fragonards. Walpole hit upon a delicious phrase when he called it "all a' flutter, like a lady's fan!" No more delightful combination of vivacity with truth, of lightness with power, of momentariness with eternal verity, has ever come upon the world from a studio.

A comparison between the *Mrs. Beaufoy* and the *Mrs. Siddons* casts a brilliant light upon one secret of Gainsborough's success, and indeed of the success of every portrait painter of the first rank. Look at the *Mrs. Beaufoy*, and note how an airy, graceful, *désinvolture* governs every line. There is nothing severe, nothing set, nothing big with possibilities, in the whole conception. The sitter was a beautiful and happy woman, with no duties to the world beyond those of a wife and mother. And this notion breathes from every stroke of the painter's brush, the canvas

is all gaiety, lightness, and life. Mrs. Siddons, on the other hand, was a public institution. Her character had more than a touch of severity ; her features had reflected superbly the passions of Lady Macbeth, but had failed with the adorable playfulness of Rosalind. With all her beauty she was a kind of female Johnson. Her nose was not so long for nothing, and Gainsborough instinctively perceived that a somewhat solemn flow of mass and line would afford a more coherent setting to her loveliness than the easier and more careless arrangement he chose for Mrs. Beaufoy. The infinite wells of harmony that lie in all things perceptible by our senses are used to perfection in both portraits, but in each Gainsborough has frankly taken his keynote from his sitter.

The *Blue Boy* tradition receives its strongest internal support from what is, perhaps, our best justification in putting the picture a thought below its author's highest level. It is a little wanting in spontaneity. If we had never heard of Sir Joshua's pronouncement we might have guessed that Gainsborough had some ulterior purpose in painting it. The French term *voulu* describes one part of its effect exactly. The warming of the blue is over-forced. In his desire to confound the President, Gainsborough has come near to supplying a proof that the President was right. What Sir Joshua said was that a cold *colour* like blue should never predominate. In the portrait of Master Buttall blue, as a colour, is almost completely lost in the warm greens and browns which fill the numerous deep folds of the boy's silk habit. The background, too, is over warm, and altogether the picture is without the simplicity which marks things like the *Lady Sheffield*, the *Mrs. Sheridan*, the *Mrs. Fane*, or the three superb portraits which hang in Mr. Alfred de Rothschild's dining-room in Seamore Place. As refutations of Sir Joshua we could name many Gainsboroughs which beat the *Blue Boy*. The *Mrs. Siddons* does so ; so do the *Lady Sheffield*, the *Lord Archibald Campbell*, the *Duchess of Richmond*, to name only a few.

Another tint, intractable to any one but a born colourist, to which Gainsborough often recurred, was a rather cold canary yellow, not the hue of a vigorous young bird, but of a faded and fatigued old songster. It is the colour of a bright tube of Naples yellow. This tint prevails in some of his best pictures, notably in a three-quarter length of

Miss Hibbert, now in the possession of Baron Alphonse de Rothschild, in Paris, and in the still finer *Squire and Mrs. Hilliard* (?) *walking in a Park*, which was at the "Old Masters" in 1885. If to blue and yellow we add black and white, we shall complete the list of Gainsborough's peculiar fancies in colour keynotes. Black he seems to have used chiefly upon small canvases, in the *Lady Mulgrave*, for instance, and the *Mrs. Fitzherbert*, now in the Grafton Gallery. White he represented with an exquisite *finesse*. I do not remember a finer example of his treatment of this colour than the full-length of *Mrs. Portman* which Lord Portman sent from Bryanston Park to the "Old Masters" in 1893. This picture dates from his Bath period, and must have been painted not much later than the *Lady Ray*. Mrs. Portman is a lady of much presence, not beautiful, but with a face to which kindliness and a robust good sense lend irresistible charm. She must have been about fifty when she sat to Gainsborough, who devoted unusual care to the painting of her head, as well as to the modulation of the subtle tones which produce the effect of white silk in the dress. Reynolds, too, and Romney were fond of white, and if any one wishes to be convinced of the superiority of Gainsborough as a colourist, he has only to compare their treatment of this particular problem with his.

A great deal of argument has been spent upon such questions as whether Gainsborough was a better painter than Reynolds, whether he was best in landscape, or in portrait, or in fancy pictures; whether he was equal to the great masters of the French, Flemish, and Spanish schools, and so on. Such questions people must answer, to some extent, according to their individual tastes, for after all we have no right to pronounce upon the relative importance of the different qualities which go to make a great painter. We may say that Gainsborough was a finer colourist than Reynolds, but then Sir Joshua excelled him in directions which, to some, may appear more important than colour. The second point is still more difficult to discuss. To me it seems incontestable that many of his portraits rise to heights in art unapproached by his landscapes. The whole bent of Gainsborough's mind was towards concentration. One detail of his practice has come down to us which throws a strong light upon this. It was his habit, when a sitter left him, to

close the window of his painting-room and look at what he had done by the scanty daylight which made its way through a round hole cut in the shutter. This enabled him to see at a glance whether his work were in focus, whether he had succeeded or not in getting the subordination he wanted, or, on the other hand, whether some detail had crept into an undesired importance. In a portrait, where the head provides a natural, dominant centre, such a practice would be of the greatest value ; but in a landscape it might, and no doubt did, confirm him in the tendency to emptiness, of which he has been so often accused. No great painter has restricted himself so invariably to the pictorial theme as Gainsborough. Even Rembrandt, between whose career and his time are many curious parallelisms, was not so strict as he. He built every picture round some simple pictorial notion, and as soon as that notion was complete he laid down his brush. Sitters are more exacting than landscapes. To please them he had often to give a head more substance and definition than he would have cared for himself, and this was excellent discipline. We may be sure that we have his patrons to thank in more senses than one for many a masterpiece.

As for Gainsborough's position in the hierarchy of artists, it depends on qualities analogous to those which have put Burns in the front rank among poets. It is easy to say what he had not. It is easy to point out that his ambition was narrow, that his culture was not great, that his faculty for taking thought was non-existent, and that in certain petty matters of equipment he has been surpassed by many unimportant people. But his art was all art. It was the pure, spontaneous expression of a personality into which no anti-artistic leaven had been mixed. In his finest portraits of women he touches a height reached by no one else. The *Mrs. Siddons*, the *Mrs. Beaufoy*, the *Lady Sheffield*, the *Mrs. Graham*, the *Mrs. Sheridan*, are delicious melodies in colour, miracles of distinction, unrivalled records of the beauty of woman. No other painter has so dazzled us with means so slight. Many of his most perfect things are at once superb in colour and scarcely more than monochromes. The *Lady Mulgrave* to which I have so often alluded is a case in point. Her provoking features are enframed in a mass of powdered hair which tells with felicitous audacity against the rich, diaphanous black about her

shoulders. The effect is like magic. The flesh painting which extorted the praise of Sir Joshua is here too, almost at its best, never, indeed, to be excelled except perhaps in the marvellous head of Mrs. Siddons and in the heads of Maria Linley and her brother at Knole. I have named Burns. The Ayrshire ploughman lives by the purity of his genius, by the quality, in fact, of his gift. Gainsborough will do the same. His pictures will not attract the scribe. Nobody will laboriously recount every stage in the process of their genesis. They afford no purchase for that confusion of the artist with the fabulist which has been, and perhaps still is, such a hindrance to the right comprehension of art. They are simply gems born of the fire struck out at the contact of a rare artistic spirit with the beauty of the world.

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